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Nomads

at the
crossroads

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- ◆ **Attack of the shrimps** – a tale of money, muscle and small fry in Bangladesh.
- ◆ **The Grim Reaper goes shopping** – to support his local superstore.



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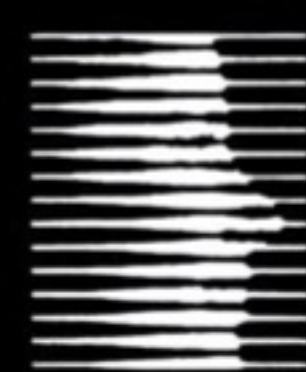
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Nomads

FROM THIS MONTH'S **EDITOR**

AS AN EDITOR here one of the first puzzles any of us face is to try and figure out exactly what we'll include in an issue of *New Internationalist*. How widely (or how narrowly) should we cast the net? It's an obvious problem when a theme is especially diffuse: 'Democracy', say, or 'Trade'. You have to sharpen the focus pretty quickly or there's a danger of sprawling all over the place. But it can be tricky, too, when subjects already seem quite precise.

Take this issue on 'Nomads' for example. It seemed logical to me when I started my research that anthropologists 'in-the-know' should be my first reference stop. I had a series of conversations with a handful of academic 'experts' and they were generous with their time in a way that I still find amazing. As usual this was extremely useful (it's always more efficient initially to buttonhole someone than it is to attack the local library). Except that the more experts I spoke with the wider my conceptual net seemed to extend.

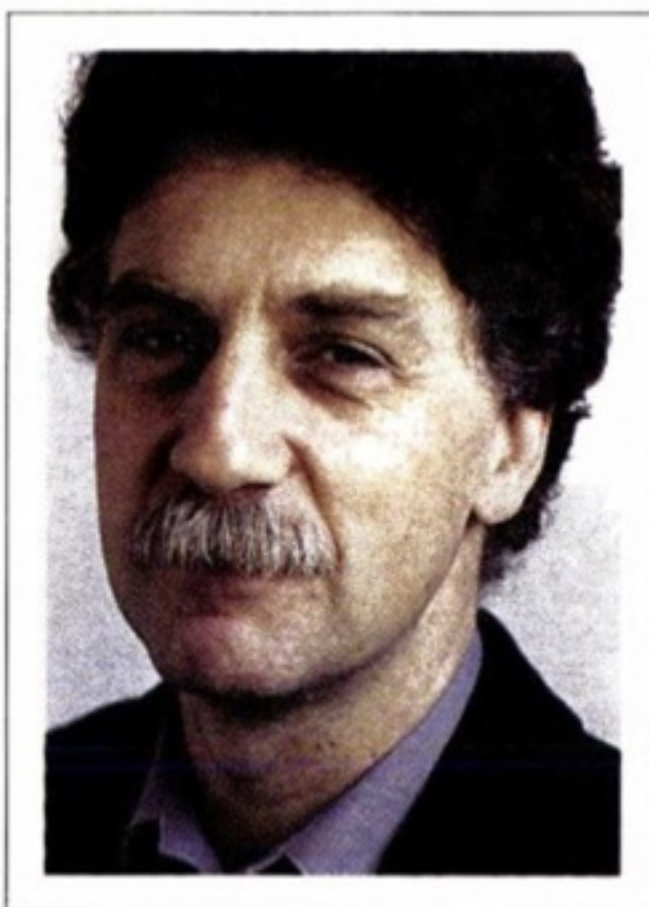
I found out quickly that 'nomad' is a noun. What I should have been concerned with more accurately was the adjective. Just because people were 'nomadic' didn't mean they were 'nomads'. The more correct terms I learned were 'pastoralists' and 'hunter-gatherers'. In both cases 'nomadism' (ie mobility) was used to greater or lesser degrees as a survival strategy. Another argument said that pastoralists with their herds of cattle or camels were the only 'true' nomads: that nomadism is a technique for keeping animals alive and hunting a technique for killing them. Fair point I thought. But by now the need for further definition was losing its appeal. The 'nomadism as survival strategy' argument seemed to make sense to me so I set out to build this issue around that core.

The next step was to see if there were ways of connecting the theme more directly to you, the reader. We actually try to do this in every issue. Our

assumption, rightly or wrongly, is that Western readers (that's about 90 per cent of you) need to feel that an issue really affects their lives in order to engage their interest. That's not to say that you can't feel empathy for the struggles of Mongol herders in Inner Mongolia or Barabaig pastoralists in Tanzania. Just that empathy has its limits.

Anyway, with that in mind the net started to widen further. I began to read about how the nomadic spirit manifests itself in our own lives – and to think more broadly still about how we react to the challenge of cultural difference. Because if nothing else nomads challenge our sense of who we are and what we want from life.

Having reached this metaphysical juncture I decided my conceptual net was wide enough. Time to call it quits. A good thing too: I was seriously toying with the idea of an article on the migratory habits of wealthy pensioners.

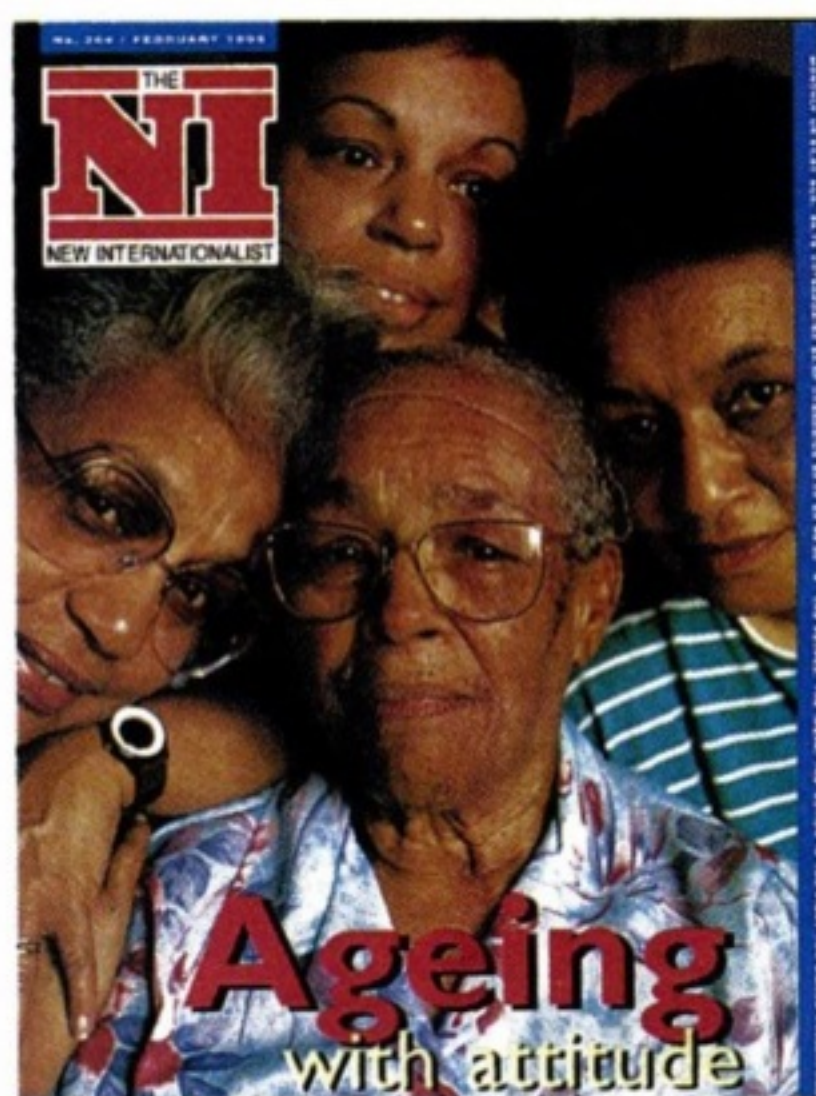


Wayne Ellwood
for the *New Internationalist* Co-operative

Letters

Healthy youth

The life expectancy figures in 'The Facts' (*Ageing* NI 264) might equally be entitled 'A sickly youth no longer'. In 1901 total life expectancy in the UK was only 47 years at birth, but was 61 for those who survived to the age of 10. Only 80 per cent of UK live births



survived to age 10 in 1901. Now it is 99 per cent. Half this century's increase in UK life expectancy, now 77 years, derives from paediatric rather than geriatric skills.

Likewise, in the box 'Are Children Bad for You?', the results reflect reductions in child mortality giving rise to a reduced need to conceive in order to achieve the desired family size.

Michael Jackson
Lancaster, England

Teaching materials

As a follow-up to your issue on *Ageing* (NI 264) I would like to point out that 1993 was the European Year of Old People and Solidarity between Generations. As part of helping teachers and young people to become more aware of the issues that affect older people everywhere, the Council for Education in World Citizenship has produced a range of materials for use in schools. They are available from CEWC, Seymour Mews House, London W1H 9PE.

Patricia Rogers
CEWC, London, England

Editor: a number of readers have written in to point out that the poem 'I would pick more daisies' (NI 254)



The **New Internationalist** welcomes your letters. But please keep them short. They may be edited for purposes of space or clarity. Include a home telephone number if possible and send your letters to the nearest editorial office. The address is inside the front cover.

is very similar both to one by Don Herold entitled 'Up with Circuses' and 'Instantes' by Jorge Luis Borges. No plagiarism was intended. There are a number of versions of the same poem.

Peltier support

Your recent issue ('Update' NI 264) mentioned the suspect case of jailed Native American activist Leonard Peltier. Your readers might like to know that there are support groups throughout England and Scotland.

Anyone wishing to help in Leonard Peltier's campaign can contact All Nations' Forum/Leonard Peltier Support Group, 13 Jamieson Road, Liverpool L15 3JD. Tel: (0)151 733 7691.

Lesley Worrall
Liverpool, England

Shadow side

It is essential to beware the shadow side of the process of 'unmasking' (NI 263). There is an element of destructiveness built into human aspirations including passionate dedication to a sterling cause.

Only a hairline divides creative commitment and 'having a go' at an opponent. Anger, even justified anger, is shot through with destructiveness. This fact too needs unmasking, at least within the consciousness of every one of us.

For example, looking through your 'Asian Miracle' stories I wonder what solutions should result from this unmasking?

I have first-hand experience of a few of those conditions

which are reported, and yes, they cry out to be eradicated. But should we not also be told some positive narratives?

The 'Asian Miracle' for all its ills comprises some pluses which deserve note. I know that to present a comprehensive story is considered by some as the road to mealy-mouthed compromise; it certainly makes incisive action even more difficult. But unmasking pure and simple is not enough either. The greater challenge is to offer constructive and sustainable alternatives. I hope you can help.

Peter Oskokas
London, England

UN Association

We were glad to see such a perceptive and interesting edition devoted to the *United Nations* (NI 262). We were however disappointed that you did not mention the United Nations Association.

There are about 200 branches of UNA in the UK and many more worldwide. All are voluntary NGOs dedicated to worldwide peace and the reform of the UN where there are faults.

Membership of UNA is both educational in raising awareness of world issues and useful in bringing pressure to bear on those who have power to bring about positive changes in the United Nations to the lasting benefit of us all.

Isobel Shepherd
London, England

Too poor

There was a point missing from your issue on the *United Nations* (NI 262) – there is no mechanism for the poor to participate. I have experienced this directly. I was asked to give a presentation on non-verbal communication and its uses at the preparatory conference on European women's issues prior to the UN international meeting in Beijing on women.

A month prior to going I realised to my horror that there were no travel or maintenance expenses – the majority of the women attending are academics or have funding from their organisations.

I am an unemployed artist and single parent. I was told through the UN in London that if checked via New York, finance would not be a problem. I faxed New York. I rang the British Council – too late to apply.

In the end, I did not go. The attempt to do so had put me in debt. I asked that my time be preserved and that the women who could go should meditate on those of us who were silenced. I have received no communication since.

Jean Grant
Liverpool, England



Indonesian arms

In the *Facts* spread in your issue on the *Arms Trade* (NI 261), Indonesia should have not one but three of the four symbols that depict arms and conflict.

The fire symbol representing conflicts involving the death of over 1,000 people certainly applies. The territory shaded as Indonesia on the map includes the annexed territories of West Papua (Irian Jaya) and East Timor.

Over 200,000 people have died in East Timor since 1975. An estimated 100,000 Timorese have been killed in West Papua since mid-1990

and 2,000 – 10,000 in Aceh (North Sumatra).

Britain, the US, former USSR and Australia are only a few of the countries which have sold arms to Indonesia. Today, Britain is Indonesia's largest arms supplier.

In 1993, 51 licences were issued for the export of military goods from Britain and British Aerospace was awarded a £500 million contract for the sale of 24 Hawk aircraft to Indonesia. Enough I feel to warrant Indonesia's inclusion in the symbol depicting 'countries building up arsenals'.

P O'Callaghan
Preston, Lancashire, England

Women weavers

On the opening day of the 1995 World Conference on Women, being held in September in Beijing, China, a 20 km ribbon made of thousands of pieces from around the world will be stitched together. The ribbon will symbolise the unity of women and will be used to form a link between the UN conference centre and the NGO Forum.

The initiative was devised by women from all over the Asia/Pacific region, and was launched at Cambodia's Water Festival. It is being co-ordinated by Khemara, a leading Cambodian voluntary organisation. In Cambodia, one kilometre of cloth has already been sewn. Women in Zimbabwe, Britain, Australia, Thailand, South Africa, Bangladesh and many other countries are also weaving.

All women are invited to contribute. Hand-woven pieces should be one metre wide and of any length and any fibre, from silk to straw.

You can register with **Khemara, 'Women weaving the World Together', National Road 5, Mittapheap Village, Russey Keo District, Phnom Penh, Cambodia**, or contact **Shirini Heerah** for more information on (0)171-620-4444.

Shirini Heerah
London, England

The views expressed on the letters page are not necessarily those of the New Internationalist.

Dzhamilla's degree

Holding on to traditional religious values has been one way of resisting Russian domination in Ingushetia, Chechnya's neighbouring republic. But, as **Olivia Ward** finds out, it has meant that women have had to retire to the kitchen.

LIKE the good host that he is, Moussa is doing everything to put me at my ease as Fatima heaps the table with steaming vegetables and *shashlik*. But I am still uncomfortable watching the women from the corner of my eye as they hang back in the doorway, waiting for the signal to bring more food.

Young Dzhamilla, who just turned 16, looks back at me and giggles silently. She has dark circles under her eyes. When her father comes in late at night she gets out of bed and begins the arduous process of scraping, washing and polishing his mud-spattered boots. Then she is up early to help prepare breakfast.

As a journalist and a foreigner here, I qualify as a sort of honorary man. Too important to hang around the kitchen with the women, and important enough to carry on serious conversations with the masters of the house. But I listen to Moussa's political discussion with half an ear. I am preoccupied with the lives of the women, the hidden realities of the household that are politely kept out of my reach.

I have to remind myself that this is modern-day Ingushetia, a tiny Russian republic in the Caucasus, whose Muslim population was subjugated by communism for seven decades. The Soviet Government preached the doctrine of male-female equality and pushed women into the workplace but gave them no help in surviving their double load.

As I finish my cup of sweet tea I slip into the kitchen to confront Fatima, a strong solid woman in her early 40s. She starts with surprise as I plant myself firmly on a stool among her daughters.

'You should be talking to my husband, not me,' she says with routine modesty.

I wave her objections aside. How is it, I ask, that after so many years of atheism, Leninism and Stalinism, Ingushetian families still fall into traditional roles?

'Well, we never lost our traditions,' she says. 'When I was married to Moussa 20 years ago we went to the Soviet registry office, then had a quiet Muslim ceremony.'

'Did you know Moussa very well before you married?' I ask.

She laughs again. 'That would have been scandalous. We saw each other at school and our

parents arranged it.'

The union was a success, as four healthy children attest. The youngest, little Chingiz, is only three years old, his father's greatest pride. Dzhamilla and her sister are there to serve, and their large dark eyes and gleaming black hair are rated above any academic ability or career ambitions.

I am irritated by this stultifying devaluation of women, and tell Fatima so. Communism did little to liberate women in other parts of Russia.

But here in the Caucasus they seemed to inherit the worst of both worlds. The war in neighbouring Chechnya has made things even more difficult, with the most traditional religious values seen as a bulwark against Russia's domination.

Dzhamilla nods her head as I speak. She hopes to be a lawyer. But how, I wonder, will she get from this Cinderella life to university? Will she become like her mother, huddled in the 'women's wing' of a spacious home with her daughters and granddaughters? Fatima appears untroubled by a routine so

segregated that she does not even eat with her husband. 'Can men and women be friends?' I ask her. 'The main thing is that they work together for the same goals. Men protect women and look after them. Women care for their men. But men are friends with other men, and women with women.'

Moussa, she adds, is a good husband.

But I look at Dzhamilla, and am troubled. She seems withdrawn, sad. As I stand in the hall later putting on my boots she draws me aside.

'Can you bring me an English grammar book when you come back?' she asks, clinging to me like a drowning woman in a floodtide. 'Everything is going backwards here. I want to learn so I can get away. When I get my degree I'll come and do something for my country. Now I can do nothing.'

Walking through the muddy streets I look back at the house, silhouetted darkly against a leaden sky. In one small room in the women's wing a light is burning.

Olivia Ward is the bureau chief for the *Toronto Star* in Russia.



JUDY HAMMOND

Update

CUBA SPECIAL

Cuba: peanuts, camels, caravans

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the illegal economic blockade by the US has meant economic crisis for Cuba. But the Cuban people and their supporters are finding some ingenious ways around their difficulties...

Mani, mani, mani!

Capitalist craze hits Havana

UNTIL RECENTLY you could walk from one end of Havana to the other without being able to buy anything at all to eat or drink. Then, suddenly, with the relaxation of Cuba's rigid economic system, there were cones of peanuts or popcorn on offer every few yards of the way.

The first 'craft fairs' appeared on the streets in September. 'Agromarkets' selling private and co-op farm produce alongside that of the state were reopened in October. In December came the indoor 'industrial

markets' for tools and household goods. Suddenly everyone seemed to have something to sell.

At the craft fair, prices are marked in US dollars. Hardly anything actually arrives on ration any more and agromarkets are the only places where meat and fresh vegetables are available. So they set their prices accordingly: a banana might cost the equivalent of six dollars.

This was probably the kind of thing Fidel Castro was talking about when he promised in November that 'we will never go back to savage capitalism'. But so far no-one's complaining about the reversal. A sign at the entrance to one agromarket says: 'There's no joy like being able to buy what you need.'

'Capitalism' is the latest in a long line of crazes. Bicycles and queues are already an art form. Now it is the turn of 'business', and no-one wants to be left out.

The craft fairs are accompanied by music and children's games. Fruit sellers try out ever more extravagant lines of patter. People lavish presents on each other –

The Government embarked on a programme of austerity measures to overcome shortages in fuel and spare parts. One was the introduction of the *camello*, the 'camel', to the streets of Havana. It consists of a trailer converted for passenger transport. Though not always comfortable it can carry up to 300 people and is quite reliable. Camels have replaced the old Hungarian buses on most of Havana's busiest routes. Similar vehicles known as *Super Tren-Bus* are now being used on provincial routes.

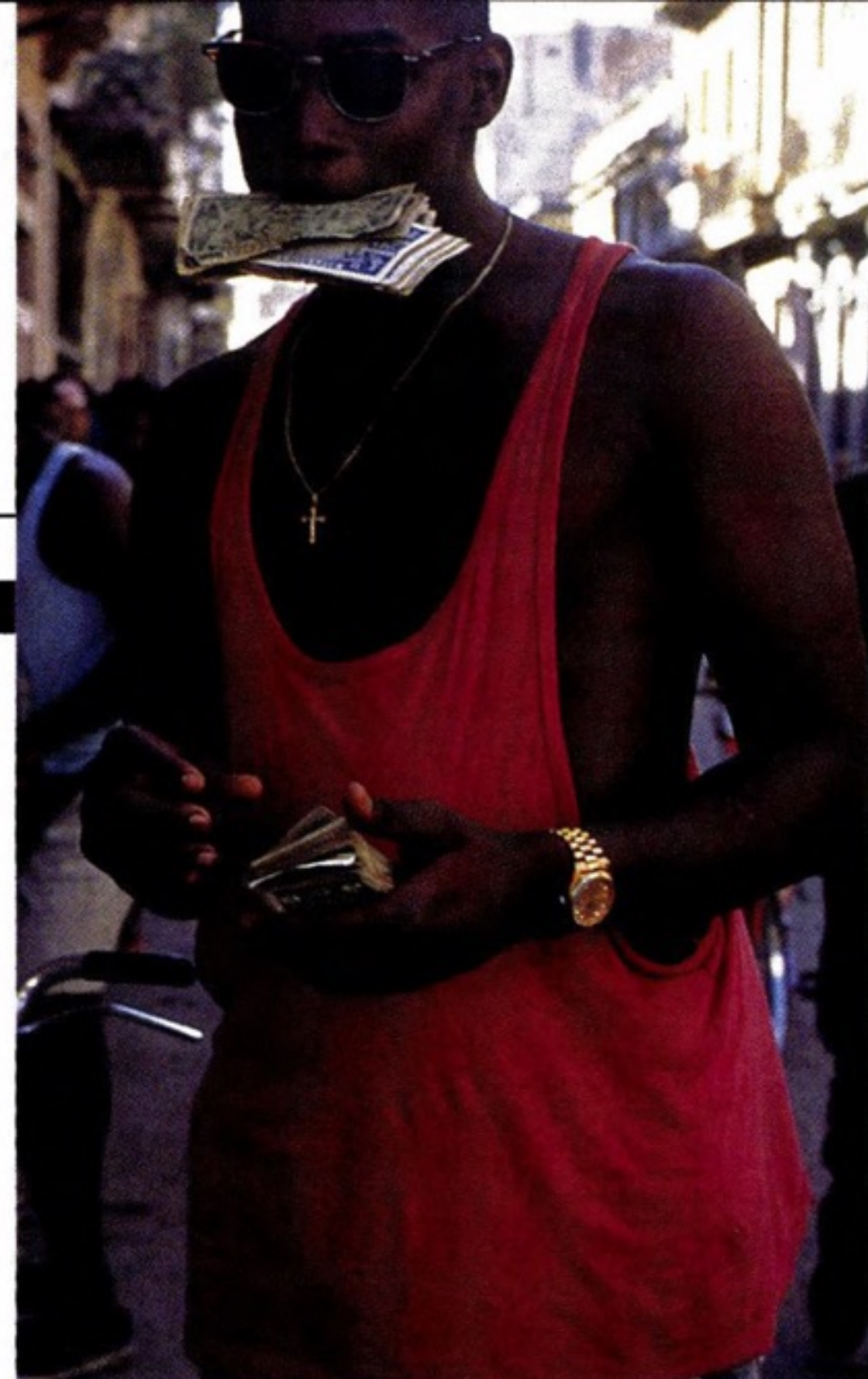


Beast of burden

'Train-buses' supplement bicycles

IN 1993 IT WAS an everyday occurrence to see hundreds of *Habernos* (people who live in Havana) waiting at bus stops for hours and then literally punching their way through when a bus eventually arrived.

Rumbling along Havana's streets the 'camel' is reducing bus-stop punch-ups.



Money talks: a dollar-changer in action (above) and a pumpkin vendor at the 'agromarket' in central Havana (left).

flowers, turtles, canaries. A magazine designer spends her evenings sewing tacky dolls for a tourist stall. An administrator sells home-made coconut sweets at the bus stop on her way home.

The explosion of energy, the profusion of goods on sale is astonishing. The begging bowls, too, have appeared overnight, each with its flakily-painted little saint.

What will become of all this once the novelty has worn off? 'Just another mixed economy in a Third World country. Nothing special,' says one observer.

For now, at least, the cry of street sellers all over Havana sounds to the outsider like 'Money! Money!' In Cuba '*mani*' means 'peanuts'.

Cath Forrest

A method of travel that is popular among young Cubans is the *botella*, the equivalent of hitchhiking, but with one substantial difference. They are supported in this by the Ministry of Transport, which has posted inspectors at all the main junctions. Their function is to stop all vehicles and allot passengers to each according to its destination.

For those who prefer pedal-power, the introduction of Chinese bicycles, now used by some 500,000 *Habernos*, is infinitely preferable to either punching or thumbing.

Last but not least is the work of solidarity groups from around the world. Havana alone has received some 400 buses, mainly from Spain and Canada, but also from Italy, France and the Netherlands. The 400 route from Havana to the beach resort of Guanabo, for example, is now entirely operated with buses from Montreal, Canada.

Though such contributions will not resolve the country's economic crisis they constitute a moral support that is of great value.

Salman Yunus



Friendshipments

Blockade breached

LAST NOVEMBER 200 US citizens successfully crossed over the border to Buffalo in Canada with 150 tons of humanitarian aid destined for Cuba.

The fourth US-Cuba Friendshipment was organized by the Minneapolis-based Pastors for Peace. Previous caravans had faced violent confrontations with US authorities and anti-Castro terrorist groups. On the second caravan 14 participants went on hunger strike for 23 days until a school bus that had been seized by US Customs was returned.

This time, in Montreal, Canadian dock workers volunteered to load the shipment for free. The *caravanistas* flew to Havana to take part in a conference in solidarity with Cuba, attended by some 2,000 delegates from around the world.

The 'caravan' now consists of some 12 routes through the US where aid is collected and public meetings take place. The routes converge on Washington for national demonstrations. On the first march, attended by some 8,000 people, former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark called the blockade 'a physical



People-power: US protesters support Cuba.

assault on an entire people and a crime against humanity'.

The next assault on the blockade is planned for June or July this year. Pastors for Peace are keen to have more representation from Europe in particular. The possibility of organizing a parallel European caravan is also being discussed.

'Most people in the US are not aware that their Government is pursuing a policy that is illegal,' says Tom Hanson, director of Pastors for Peace, 'that it is contrary to international law and to some of the conventions to which the US is a signatory'.

When last discussed by the General Assembly of the UN, 101 nations voted against the embargo and only the US and Israel voted in favour.

Sarah Podro

Pastors for Peace, IFCO, 331 17th Ave, SE Minneapolis, MN 55414. Tel 612 378 0062. Fax 612 378 0134.

AFGHANISTAN



Daily terror: Kabul civilians in the cross-fire.

People in pieces

Pointless Kabul massacre persists

ONE EARLY-autumn afternoon a PM-21 heavy rocket landed in the middle of a busy bazaar in the centre of Kabul. The victims were immediately brought by taxi, bus, bicycle and tank to the Jamuriat hospital run by *Médecins sans Frontières* (MSF). One taxi had a mother with six children in the back seat. Another had five children in the trunk.

When the doctors attempted to remove them they realized that none of the victims was in one piece. Within minutes the courtyard of the hospital was scattered with rows of limbs, torsos, severed heads. The death-toll of this particular attack was put at 54 dead and over 200 injured. MSF say that at least 90 per cent of casualties they see are civilian.

Such scenes are commonplace in Kabul, where the daily bombardment of the city has claimed about 20,000 lives in the last 12 months. Each day up to 300 rockets, countless mortars and small-arms bullets fall indiscriminately.

They are fired by troops loyal to renegade Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who opposes the 'government' of President Rabbani, whose troops in their turn fire out from the city centre. Both sides, of course, miss the military and hit the civilians.

What the factions *are* good at is switching sides – more often than not for purely financial reasons. For their loyalty the *Mujahedin* receive about \$15 each per month, plus the perk of looting bus passengers and setting up checkpoints for the ritual intimidation of anyone who passes through them. Speaking with the various

party leaders is rather like listening to a talking Action Man. The jargon of 'Islamic revolution', 'free elections', 'neutral interim government' and so on is reeled off parrot-fashion. These leaders are little more than mercenary warlords, using the word 'Islam' to manipulate rather than liberate.

The front lines zig-zag the city. Civilians cross them during moments of cease-fire to collect firewood and visit surviving friends and relatives. During the winter they face a choice of freezing to death or getting shot.

When they speak it is without enthusiasm for their 'liberators'. Most people have given up trying to understand who is fighting whom or for what. The hierarchy of arms means that resistance or complaint is impossible. It will be a long time before they can pick up the pieces of their lives, and they know it. Unfortunately, the rest of the world does not.

Stefan A Smith



BOTH PHOTOS: STEFAN A SMITH

Update

ENERGY

Solar system

Eritrea hospitals plug in



DULAS ENGINEERING

Making light work of it: soaking up the sun's energy at Adi Quala.

ON 29 FEBRUARY 1992, in newly-liberated Eritrea, women and men of Adi Quala celebrated the commissioning of the country's first fully solar-powered hospital system. Adi Quala is an agricultural town of 14,000 people about 70 kilometres south of the capital, Asmara, and 30 kilometres from the border with Tigray.

On good days electricity used to be received from Asmara for just a few hours in the evening. This caused constant problems for the hospital, which caters for 50,000 people with a staff of 21. Now the solar-powered system provides all essential requirements completely independently from the grid connection.

The success of this pilot project led to a larger second-phase project with three similar hospital systems installed by local technicians, followed in June 1994 by a further 12 systems. To date Dulas Engineering, based in Wales, has supplied more than 60 solar-powered refrigerator units for clinics and hospitals in Eritrea.

'Photovoltaics' (PV) for medical

applications is now a mature technology for converting sunlight into electricity. The initial costs may be high – in the region of \$37,000 for the system installed at Adi Quala. But a study in the Gambia in 1994 calculated the cost of a dose of vaccine, using PV refrigeration, to be 33 per cent cheaper than if a kerosene refrigerator had been used. Increases in fossil fuel prices, combined with low maintenance and no fuel costs have greatly improved the economics of solar power. The lack of infrastructure to support the new technology and supply spares remains, however, a practical restraint on further development.

Although technically complex when compared with traditional appropriate technologies, solar power has now become an economic option for off-grid medical operations in tropical countries. If the practical and conceptual barriers are overcome, little then remains to prevent the rapid expansion of decentralized, fuel-free electricity generation around the world.

Guy Watson

Chlorophyll

by Sacha



Meat by name

BRITISH SUPERMARKETS have been bending over backwards recently to offer their customers ultra-cheap meat products. Many of these feature 'mechanically-recovered' meat.

For the curious, mechanically-recovered meat means that the carcass has already had the best meat removed: the remaining bits are put through a rather vicious washing machine to strip the last shreds of soft tissue off the bones.

This makes a watery greasy paste or slurry, grey-white and potentially full of bacteria. 'Ensure the product is cooked throughout,' says Tesco of its Value Burgers, and 'Ensure no trace of red remains,' warns Kwik Save about its No Frills Burgers and Grills.

Living Earth & The Food Magazine Vol 3 No 28

Top notes

INTERNATIONAL WARBLING megastar Whitney Houston took South Africa by storm. 'It is my spiritual home,' she gushed. She took time off from her singing for two other priorities.

The first was to pledge a million Rand (about \$250,000) to local children's charities, saying that all children needed a safe place to live, good health and nutrition.

The second was to invest an undisclosed sum in a local business, New Age Beverages, whose main activity is canning and distributing Pepsi.

Living Earth & The Food Magazine Vol 3 No 28

Oil-spill spoils

AN ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP in Russia has been making a desperate attempt to organize a clean-up of 150,000 tons of oil that spilled from a pipeline near Usinsk between June and August 1994.

The Socio-Ecological Union (SEU) says that with the spring thaw the oil will seep into the Kolva, Usa and Pechora rivers and thence into the Arctic basin. KOMINEFT is a drilling company responsible for the clean-up but, says SEU, it has no knowledge of environmental protection.

The Russian Ministry of Ecology remains dormant. SEU has developed its own clean-up scheme in consultation with the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation and the European Union for Coastal Conservation in Holland, and seeks urgent international support for its efforts.

Vladimir Zamoyski

Quote

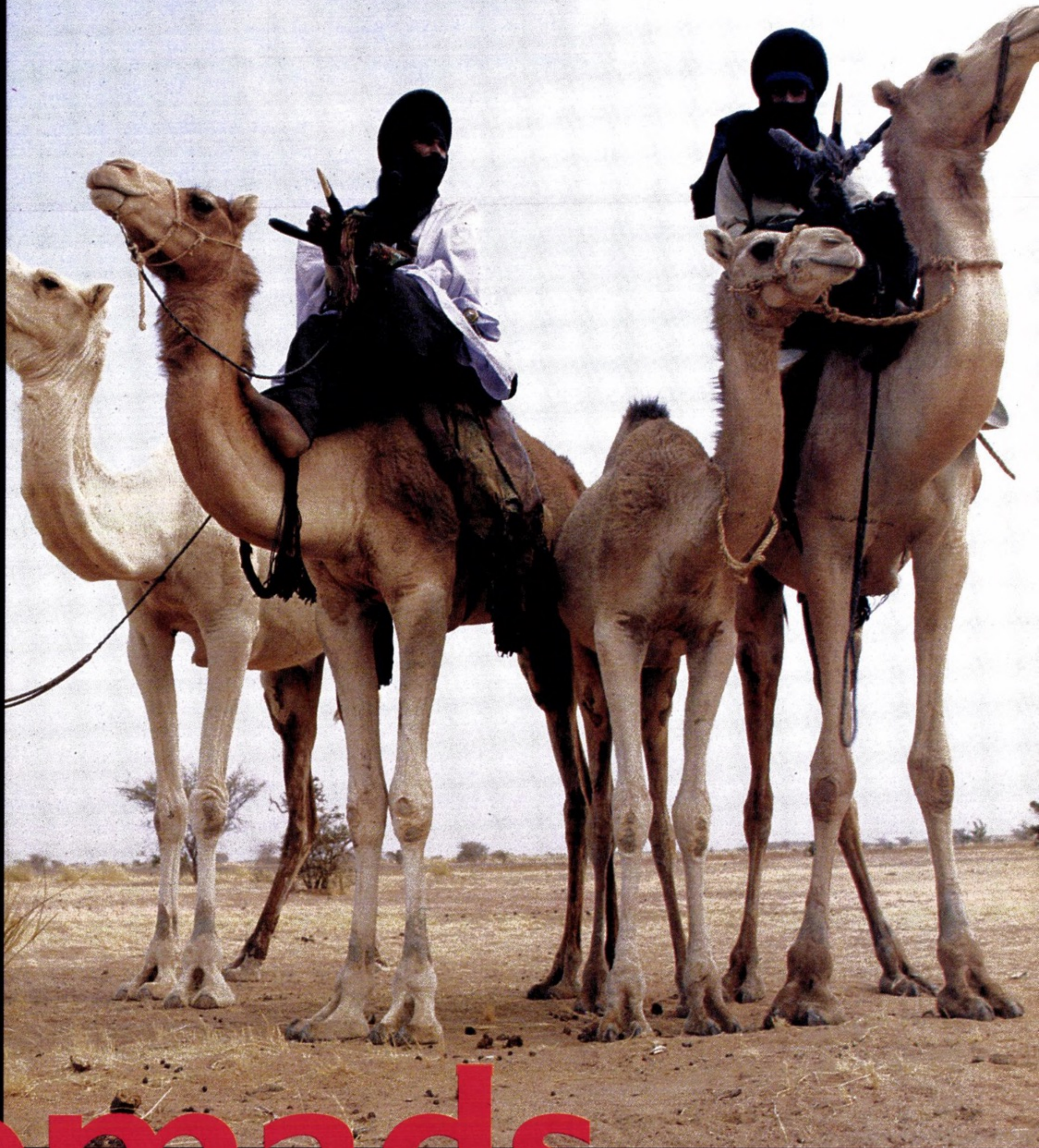
'There is a kind of cultural racism going on when people think African musicians have to make a certain kind of music. No-one asks Paul Simon "Why did you use black African musicians? Why don't you use Americans? Why don't you make your own music? What kind of music is Paul Simon supposed to do?"'

Beninese pop singer Angelique Kidjo's reply to saxophonist Branford Marsalis asking her why she used drum machines and synthesizers instead of traditional rhythms.

The conflict between settled societies and nomads is as old as Cain and Abel. But now it threatens to destroy nomadic societies.

Wayne Ellwood

explores the accelerating antagonism and suggests that we would do better to preserve our differences.



Nomads

at the crossroads

The Great Wall of China is one of history's boldest and clearest symbols of a frontier. Erected over 2,000 years ago this colossal piece of engineering snakes hundreds of miles across the undulating plains of China's Northwest. Gazing towards the horizon from the walkway on top of the wall the grassy steppes seem to stretch on forever, to the rugged

mountains of Mongolia and beyond to the endless Siberian taiga. When it was built the Great Wall symbolized the outer edge of civilization, a clear demarcation between the nomadic bands of barbarians beyond and the first unified Chinese Empire.

One Chinese Imperial Secretary, fearful of invasion by the warlike Mongols, described the nomadic horsemen as wild

animals: 'In their breasts beat the hearts of beasts,' he wrote. 'From the most ancient time they have never been regarded as part of humanity.'¹

Today the Great Wall is a relic of history and an obligatory stop for foreign tourists on package tours. Buses disgorge swarms of visitors from New Jersey and Tokyo while industrious hawkers pitch postcards of Genghis Khan and bottles of Coca-Cola. The Mongol land north of the Wall (known as Inner Mongolia to distinguish it from the Republic of Mongolia) is now controlled by China. The nomads are still there, but they are a threat no longer.

The Chinese have discovered a way of

uriant; in the harsh winter, when temperatures may drop to minus 40°C, they retreat to sheltered valleys.

This mobility is absolutely critical to Mongol culture – as it is to all nomads. But like governments the world over, the Chinese are suspicious of this central core of nomadism, this incomprehensible, alien urge to move. So they've set out to do something else about it. With the introduction of post-Maoist economic reforms herders no longer have customary rights to land. Instead they have to bid to win grazing rights to specific parcels, called *kulums* (enclosures). In return the Mongol owners are obliged to erect a house and dig a well.

These ranches are big, often 20 or 30 square kilometres, but they are rarely vast enough to have both good summer and winter pastures.

What this means is that the Mongols have little choice but to plant crops to use as forage

for their stock over the scarce winter months. Beijing has also demanded that the herders abandon their subsistence approach (essentially producing for themselves, selling animals when and if they need to) and enter the modern market economy – a shift which has led to much larger herds. With more animals the nomads now find themselves both cut off from their traditional migratory routes and increasingly hemmed in by expanding agriculture. The result? Serious over-grazing, soil compaction and, inevitably, advancing desertification.

Elsewhere this process of making nomads settle down (what is sometimes referred to as 'sedenterization') has been carried out with force. When Stalin imposed collectivization (making nomads into ranch-

ers) on Kazakh herders in the 1930s, as many as half the population are estimated to have died fighting the change. Forty years later in Somalia forced settlement, influenced by the Soviet collectivist model, proved disastrous. After the drought of 1974 Somali planners attempted to move 120,000 camel herders from the north into four villages on the Indian Ocean coast. The goal was to train them to be fishermen and small farmers, not an easy task in a region where pastoralism is considered nothing less than a divine calling and camels are fussed over and loved like children. No points for guessing the scheme was a flop.²

Modern services

The desire to control nomads politically and to incorporate them into national (ie non-nomadic) culture has always been strong. By their very nature nomads rub nation states up the wrong way. They don't fit neatly into national boundaries and they tend to look and behave differently from majority populations. In post-colonial states run by bureaucrats wedded to the modernist vision of national progress, nomads are seen as distinctly 'unmodern' – an embarrassment, rather than productive members of society.

Whether we're talking about small bands of nomadic hunters in the Amazon Basin, Inuit hunters in the Canadian Arctic or nomadic pastoralists in East Africa, there is strong pressure from governments everywhere to make nomads stay put. The reasons are varied, sometimes benevolent, usually patronizing. They need to be brought together for their own good, government officials claim – so they can be educated, taxed and given proper health care, electricity and roads.

'We want, as a democratic government, to give all citizens the modern services that a state should give its citizens,' the Israeli advisor on Arab affairs said in 1978 in an effort to justify settlement of Bedouin nomads.³ The same rationale was widely shared by African countries like the Sudan, home to nearly three million nomadic herders from various tribal groups. Efforts began to 'modernize' the livestock sector 30 years ago. One of the first goals of the (mainly Arab) Government in Khartoum was to settle the (mainly Black) nomads in the south. In the soothing words of a Government report of the time: 'sedenterization... is a means of improving the economic and social conditions of those communities... to integrate them into the life of the nation and to enable them to contribute fully to national progress.'⁴

If not for their own good, then nomads must be settled for the good of the nation. State planners claim that wandering pastoralists are inefficient and that they are ignorant of modern animal husbandry.

...the Chinese are suspicious of this central core of nomadism, this incomprehensible, alien urge to move.

keeping them in their place. Since 1949, when the Communists took control, millions of Han Chinese, with government encouragement, have flooded onto the steppes – with the result that Mongols are now a minority in their own country. There are 20 million Chinese in Inner Mongolia and barely four million Mongols. Thousands of acres of former pasture have been turned into irrigated farmland and leased to outsiders, disrupting centuries-old migration routes in the process.

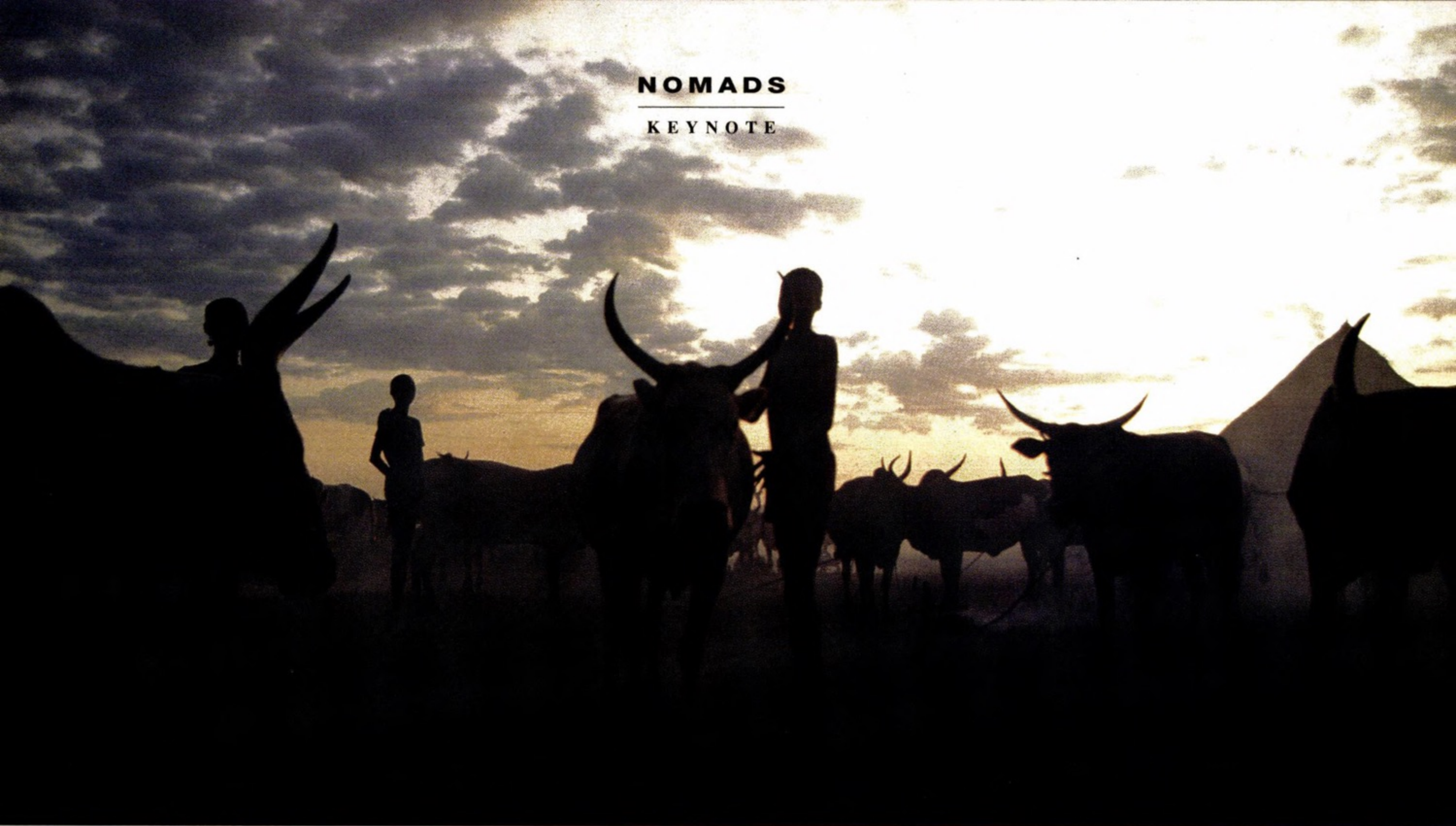
Traditionally, Mongols are pastoral nomads: that means they move their animals in a predictable pattern according to the seasons and the availability of forage. In the summer they travel to high ground where rain is heavier and grasses more lux-

Shrinking horizons: a herder takes a break with his horse in Inner Mongolia. Han Chinese now outnumber Mongols five to one.



NOMADS

KEYNOTE



Nightfall at a Nuer cattle camp in southern Sudan: Government planners tend to dismiss nomads as both inefficient and backwards.

Their irrational tendency to increase herd numbers threatens to turn delicate range-land into unproductive wasteland.

These assertions are bolstered by a theory known as the 'tragedy of the commons', a rationale which has shaped government and aid-agency attitudes to nomadic herders for the last three decades. Briefly the theory says this: lands held in common, rather than privately-owned, will inevitably suffer environmental degradation since it is in each nomad's interest to maximize returns by adding more animals to the family herd.

The logical solution following from this analysis is for common lands to be controlled by the state or put into the hands of private owners. And that is just what's happening in African countries like Kenya and Tanzania, where nomads are being dispossessed in their thousands.

Private ownership

In Kenya the Maasai have lost more than 1,000 square miles of grazing land over the past century. And the process is accelerating. In the early 1970s the Government launched its 'Group Ranches' scheme to register large chunks of savannah to particular Maasai communities. This was to be the first step towards private ownership of all Maasai common lands. It was devastatingly effective. Before long more educated or influential Maasai used their guile to hive off huge portions of land within the group territory. As one nomad complained bitterly: 'We said all of us should be given equal pieces of land. But the chairman took a bigger portion than all the other people... My piece is small, only 60 hectares, while

the chairman has 320 hectares.'⁵

This soon sparked a desperate free-for-all as ordinary herders saw they would be left with nothing if they did not claim land themselves. Eventually the ranches were subdivided with the majority of Maasai receiving plots too small to support their herds. Unable to make a living the nomads soon sold their small plots: today 40 per cent of some Group Ranches has been purchased by outsiders, mostly speculators.⁶

In addition, thousands of hectares of Maasai pasture have been creamed off by corrupt officials and local bigwigs. In his travels through Maasailand in 1992 British journalist George Monbiot found communities who had lost nearly all their land to outsiders. In some places, he wrote: 'The entire savannah had been divided among politicians and their friends. Some of the best land belonged to President Moi; the second best to George Saitoti, the Vice-President and the inferior places to their colleagues.'⁷

To the south, in Tanzania, a quarter of a million nomads have had lands snatched by sharp-eyed entrepreneurs and massive state-run farming projects. On the Hanang plains near Arusha the Barabaig people, semi-nomadic cattle herders, have lost more than 40,000 hectares to a mammoth wheat-growing project funded by Canadian Government aid dollars. In some cases the dispossession has been violent: pastoralists have been beaten and their homes torched by Government workers clearing the land in advance of the towering Canadian-supplied tractors. Evidence is

already mounting that mechanized monocropping of wheat is eroding the land at a rapid rate.⁸

The view that common ownership causes nomads to abuse the land is rooted in ignorance. In fact countless examples show that pastoral peoples traditionally had sophisticated systems to manage common resources. And this makes sense. The land is all that nomads have – to degrade it or treat it foolishly would be tantamount to suicide. The Barabaig, for example, have complex layers of control involving the community, clans and individual households. Access to pasture and water is rigidly controlled to avoid over-grazing and serious sanctions are levied on those who abuse customary rules.

State planners claim that wandering pastoralists are inefficient and ignorant of modern animal husbandry.

In Niger, FulBe pastoralists elect a traditional manager called a *Ruga* to regulate herders' use of natural resources. The *Ruga* decides which migration routes should be used according to local conditions and what animals should use which pastures. He also sets the times at which herds migrate and settles any conflicts which may arise between nomads and farmers along the way. If there are conflicts between nomads the *Ruga* alone decides on an appropriate punishment, including banishment from the community if necessary.⁹ When nomadic

PHOTO: BETTY PRESS / PANOS PICTURES



NOMADS

KEYNOTE

'Uncanny resourcefulness': rifle slung across his back, an Inuit hunter in northern Canada trudges across the bleak tundra in search of game.

PHOTO: JEFF SPEED

herders 'own' the land in common they make the laws regulating its use – and they make sure that everyone obeys them for the good of the community. The real tragedy occurs when lands are enclosed and environmental stewardship is replaced by intensive use for short-term profit.

Nomadic hunters share this same approach: living in symbiosis with the natural world, taking no more than they need and respecting the limits of the land. For example, Cree hunters in northern Quebec consider the animals they kill *chashimikow* – a 'gift' from God. They believe they must not kill too much and only what is given. As a way of showing their seamless connection to nature they burn a piece of meat after the hunt, so the smoke is dispersed in the wind as a sign of respect to the animal spirits.¹⁰ As anthropologist Richard Lee notes: 'Nomadic hunting societies have used the land for millennia and even doing their worst they couldn't do much damage.'

Violent clashes

Now, as age-old cultures are deprived of their lands, their mobility is rapidly changing. The damage is emerging everywhere. A classic example is the national park system in Africa. Under the guise of 'conservation' both hunter-gatherers and pastoralists are excluded – often by force – from forests and grasslands they have used for thousands of years. As local communities no longer 'own' the land they have little incentive to 'manage' it in a traditional, sustainable manner. The result is increased poaching and violent clashes between conservationists and nomads. In Waza National Park in Cameroon villagers were moved outside the park fence and can be jailed or fined if found on their former territory. With no stake of their own in the wildlife local people now act as guides for Nigerian poachers

with high-powered rifles who slaughter any animal that happens to wander into range.¹¹

The attitudes and practices of nomadic peoples toward the environment differ profoundly from the values of modern industrial society. It is by now a cliché (but no less compelling) to suggest that tribal peoples feel a mysterious spiritual link to the natural world – a fundamental bond which the rest of us, chained to our houses and property, have lost.

This may go some way towards explaining the deep-rooted ambivalence that settled cultures everywhere seem to feel for nomads. We admire them for their perceived independence as we resent them for an imagined freedom which has always escaped our grasp. In their disdain for national borders and distrust of centralized authority nomads exhibit a healthy scepticism of power – a scepticism we would do well to heed. Nomadic peoples tend to be politically egalitarian: their mobility gives them a safety valve. Like the Maku hunters of the Northwest Amazon most nomads bristle at the abuse of power by tribal leaders. If one Maku gets too bossy the others will simply pack up and leave.¹²

In his meditation on Australian

Aborigines, *The Songlines*, Bruce Chatwin wrote that 'psychiatrists, politicians, tyrants are forever assuring us that the wandering life is an aberrant form of behaviour; a neurosis; a form of unfulfilled sexual longing; a sickness which, in the interests of civilization, must be suppressed.'

Part of this suspicion is lodged deep in our cultural memory: the warlike, rapacious Huns; the marauding Mongol hordes; the shifty Native Americans who hunt buffalo and refuse to till the soil. This fear, now groundless, is still felt. In Europe, Gypsies have been reviled as vagrants and thieves for generations. A quarter of a million perished in Nazi concentration camps during the Second World War. And the hate continues – in February this year a Gypsy community in eastern Austria was attacked and four men were killed. The Gypsies were warned to 'go back to India'. They've lived in the area for more than 600 years.

It is their 'wandering life' that makes nomads unique. Whether hunters or herders they display an uncanny resourcefulness and flexibility in their ability to survive on some of the most marginal lands on earth. Their elusive mobility enables them to adapt, and sometimes to prosper, in harsh and unpredictable environments. Reason enough for us to support their struggle to maintain their distinct way of life – on their own terms. But if we are really to accept our common links with nomads – and challenge our deep-seated prejudices – we're going to have to confront a more basic and perhaps more primal fear. Our stubborn refusal to look in the mirror and recognize ourselves. ■

¹ *What Am I Doing Here?*, Bruce Chatwin, Penguin 1990. ² 'Resettlement Schemes for Nomads: The Case of Somalia', Jorg Janzen, *Atlas of World Development*, Wiley, Chichester 1994. ³ *The Bedouin of the Negev*, Minority Rights Group, London 1990. ⁴ *Project of Community Development for Settlement of Nomads in the Sudan*, Government of Sudan 1962. ^{5,6} 'Social and Economic Factors in the Privatization, Sub-Division and Sale of Maasai Ranches', John Galaty, *Nomadic Peoples* 30:1992. ⁷ *No Man's Land*, George Monbiot, Macmillan, London 1994. ⁸ 'The Barabaig/NAFCO Conflict in Tanzania', Charles Lane, *Forests, Trees and People Newsletter* No 20. ⁹ *Baobab* 14, ALIN, Dakar, July 1994. ¹⁰ 'The Enduring Pursuit', Harvey A Feit, *Key Issues in Hunter-Gatherer Research*, Berg, Oxford 1994. ¹¹ *Whose Eden?* IIED, London 1994. ¹² 'Forest Rovers of the Amazon', John Reid, *UNESCO Courier*, November 1994.

Nomadic Connections

Contacts for further information and action on nomadic peoples.

Cultural Survival (USA), 215 First Street, Cambridge, MA USA 02142 Tel (617) 621-3818; Fax (617) 441-5417. **Cultural Survival (Canada)** 620 – 1 Nicholas Street, Ottawa, ON K1N 7B7 Tel (613) 241-4500; Fax (613) 241-2292

Minority Rights Group, 379 Brixton Road, London SW9 7DE, England. Tel (071) 978-9498; Fax (071) 738-6265

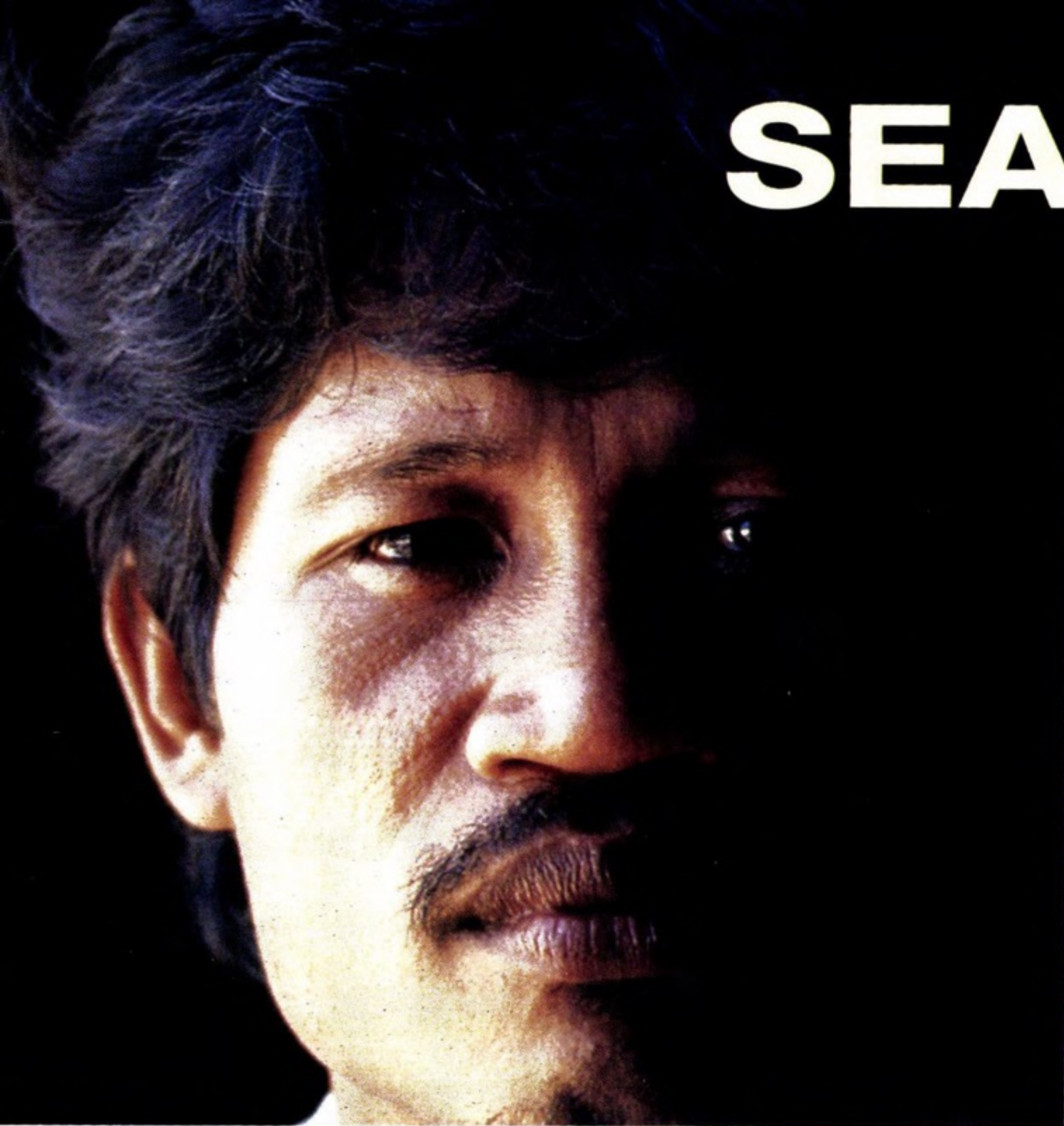
World Council of Indigenous Peoples, 100 Argyle Street, 2nd floor, Ottawa, ON Canada. Tel (613) 230-3030; Fax 230-9340

International Institute for Environment and Development, 3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1H 0DD, England. Tel (071) 388-2117; Fax (071) 388-2826

Arid Lands Information Network (ALIN), Casier Postal 3, Dakar-Fann, Senegal. Tel (221) 25 28 08; Fax (221) 25 45 21

Leeds Development Education Centre, 151-153 Cardigan Road, Leeds LS6 1LJ, England. Tel (01132) 784030

SEA NOMADS



THE SAMA BAJO are a small group of sea-faring nomadic people who've lived and fished near south-eastern Sulawesi in Indonesia for more than five centuries. They live in temporary villages built on sandbanks or on beaches or at sea as boat-dwellers. They sometimes experience a reverse form of sea-sickness if they spend too long on land.

For the Sama Bajo the sea is a combination of *tambah* (medicine), *batam banang* (home), *lalang* (road), *alu'intah* (food) and *seha* (friend). It's also home to their ancestral god *Umba Made Lau*. Major rituals centre on the water. After a child is born the umbilical cord and after-birth are thrown into the sea. According to Sama shaman Sandro Nduseng this ensures that 'their spiritual brothers and ancestors will protect and watch them throughout their life'.

Today the Sama Bajo are under severe threat. Large areas of coral have been pillaged for limestone; the reefs on which they rely for fish are dying. At the same time Japanese and Taiwanese trawlers are scooping up the remaining fish and destroying the ocean floor with their nets. In addition Australia has prohibited 'outsiders' from fishing for shark fin and sea cucumber (traditional Sama Baja foods) within its exclusive 200-mile economic zone.

Sara Medhurst is a journalist and film researcher; John Darling is a filmmaker who made Below the Wind, a documentary about Indonesian fishermen voyaging into Australian waters.



PHOTOS: JOHN DARLING



The Sama Bajo spend most of their lives at sea but have set up small villages built on stilts like Bonta-Bonta (top right). On open water in the harsh sun young women use rice paint to protect their skin (middle). Resting on their boats in a calm harbour (below) the sea nomads hang freshly-caught squid across bamboo rods to dry.

Some people can't imagine leaving their own neighbourhood while others can't wait for their next trip to Bermuda or Bombay. **Oakland**

Ross reflects on the meaning of travel.

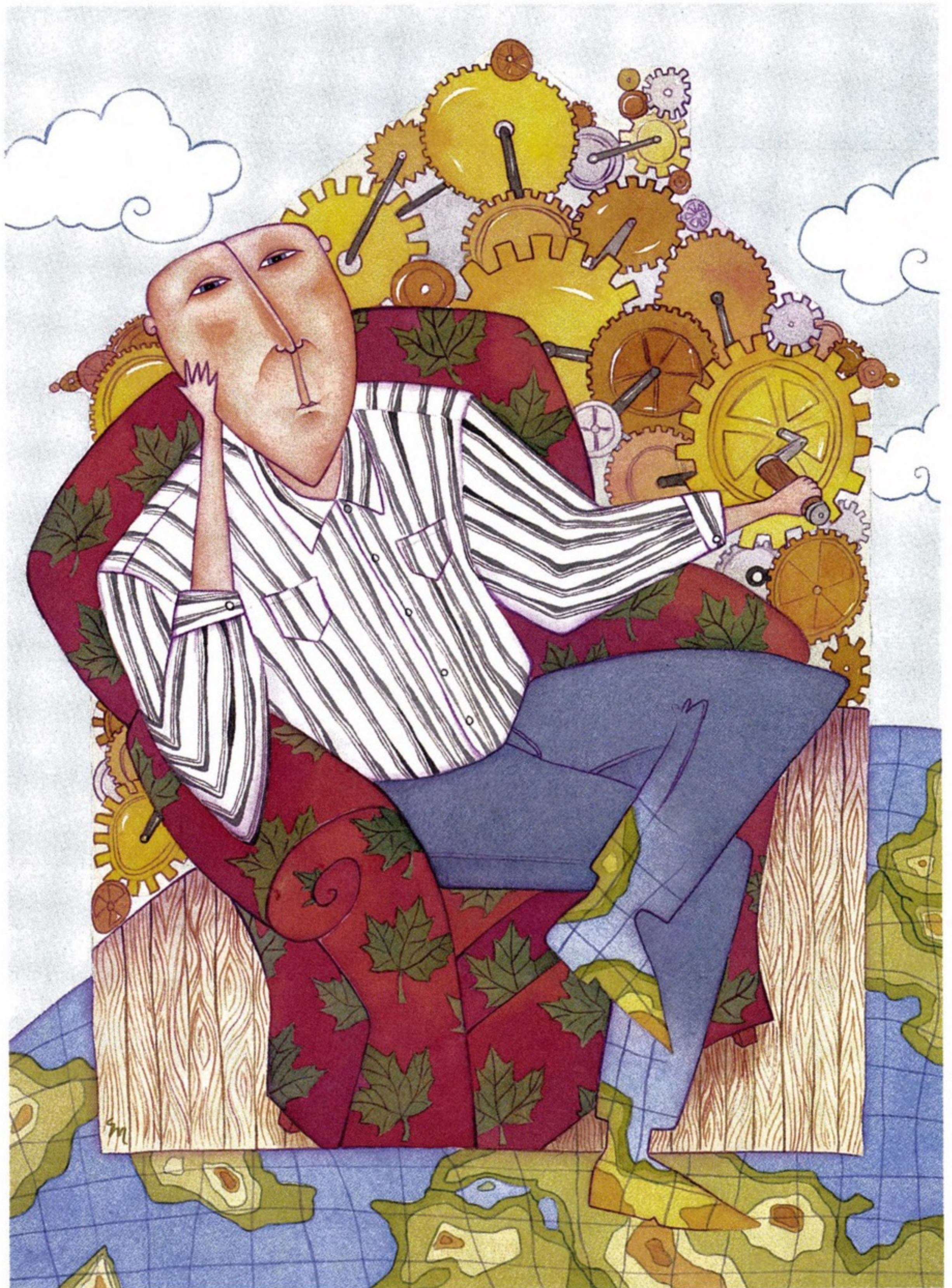


ILLUSTRATION: CHUM MCLEOD

Between home and horizon

DURING the 1980s I was a foreign correspondent for the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, first in Latin America and later in Africa. In both cases I was a regional correspondent covering not just one country but a continent or more. Especially in Latin America I was forever on the move, rarely in one country for more than two weeks at a time. I sometimes went five months or longer without seeing the place I called home – a one-bedroom apartment on Rio Nilo in Mexico City.

There was little that was predictable about my life then. I had to write and file my stories, but the circumstances in which I did so were always changing. When I look back, I find it extremely difficult to remember in what part of the year any particular event took place. The normal systems of reference that we use to fix a memory in time – the cycle of the seasons or of the school year – didn't apply.

To a remarkable degree my life didn't go around and around. It went on and on. I suppose you could say it was an open, one-way ticket rather than a succession of round-trip fares. And in some ways I was happier than I've ever been, before or since. That isn't to say I'm unhappy with the way my life is now – a small house with a mansard roof, mortgage payments, frequent tennis games, lots of familiar friends, a dishwasher. Still, I rarely get through a day without a pang of longing for the pure and undistracted energy of those vagabond years.

I remember the trajectory of my emotions each time I set out from Mexico City not knowing how long I'd be away or how many countries I'd get to, or whether this journey – ostensibly to Nicaragua, say – would eventually take me all the way to Tierra del Fuego. I'd be filled with excitement at getting away. And then, just as I was closing the door to my apartment, I'd feel a stab of regret. I'd think of the friends, the diurnal rituals I was leaving behind and for a while I would be downright blue. This feeling would last for the drive to the airport and even dog me into the terminal.

But by the time my plane had lifted off from the tarmac I'd be feeling the first rustles of a transformation I experienced whenever I set out on another journey. I felt myself thrilling to an almost effortless pleasure – the joy of perpetual motion. In those days motion meant work. The two ideas were just about interchangeable. While I was on the road I did little

else but work – days without end – because there was little else. I was a reporter. Work meant tracking down stories. Everything I did, everyone I spoke to, everywhere I went – it was all part of my job. I never had to force myself to work or to work harder. I couldn't seem to stop.

I spent very little time on personal or social maintenance. There seemed to be no need. I had no community responsibilities, because I was travelling on my own. All my friends were directly related to my work – either other journalists with whom I could exchange impressions or else local residents who could tell me about their countries. I lived in hotels. I dined in restaurants. I left my laundry in a plastic bag in the hall outside my door. I led a life that was distilled into two almost pure and unadulterated elements – travel and work. And they seemed to merge.

I was rarely unhappy, at least not on my own account. Most people become unhappy because they are dissatisfied with the way things are in the places where they find themselves. But I was always going someplace else. If I didn't like my current circumstances – well, not to worry. There'd be a whole new set just beyond the next immigration hall. Sometimes I wonder if it was only when human society became settled and sedentary that people started looking inside themselves, into their daily rhythms for purpose and meaning, rather than toward a geographical horizon, a place where they could go. Was it only then that they began to doubt?

In Latin America, the purpose of my life lay well outside myself. It was aboard the next airplane, in the next city or somewhere out on the streets of the next country I was headed for. I didn't worry about myself, I worried about other things.

Were the rebels in El Salvador right to launch their latest offensive now or shouldn't they have waited until after the next US congressional vote on military aid to the Salvadorean Government?

Would President Raul Alfonsin in Argentina withstand the latest challenge from hard-line elements in the military? Wouldn't it be fun to live in an Indian village in the highlands of Panama for a while?

In those days I didn't experience personal angst. I thought this was a turning

outward of my soul, part of my becoming an older and wiser human being. Now I realize it was simply a function of my being always on the move. When I finally returned to Canada, to the day-to-day problems of a revolving life, I quickly reverted to my former state. I now sometimes walk with my head down, staring at the sidewalk – brooding, brooding, brooding. Do I have any hope of personal fulfilment? What is the meaning of existence? Is there a larger purpose to it all?

I rarely broached such questions in Latin America or in Africa. I was far too busy getting myself from point A to point B to worry about the nature of the alphabet. I didn't think much about time, either. I became a creature of the present, because the present seemed to fill my needs. I suppose that all people are suspended in a

...the purpose of my life lay well outside myself. It was aboard the next airplane or on the streets of the next country.

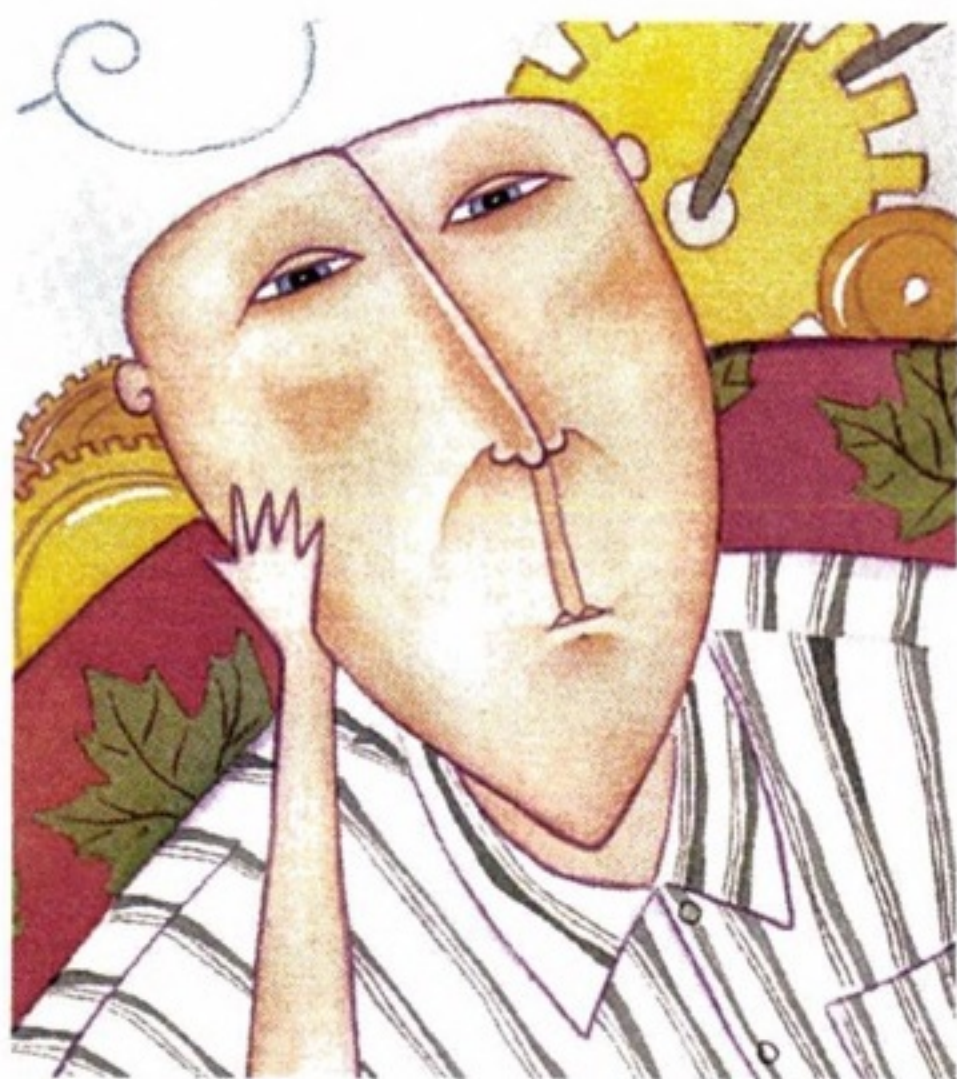
more or less uneasy balance between the forces of gravity and centrifuge, between home and horizon. It so happened that I barely had a home and so felt little of that gravitational weight, that pressure to return. I was without an orbit, in a kind of free flight.

Later, in Africa, I lived in a small white-washed bungalow in a mixed-race neighbourhood of Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe. Sprays of bougainvillea washed over the walls of the yard beneath mango and avocado trees, amid explosions of poinsettia. Friends dropped by unexpectedly. I fell in love with a woman I met there and she moved in to stay.

Each morning – or at least each morning when I wasn't on the road – we'd awaken to the cool, splashing sunshine of the highveld, listen to the *BBC World Service* at breakfast and read the *Harare Herald*. Our days unfolded in predictable ways, developed a pattern, a fabric of ritual.

And my attitude towards travel changed. I still spent most of my time on the road, tramping all over Africa rather than Latin America. But I wasn't travelling as light. I had to push myself harder to keep going. I felt myself weighed down. I moved ahead, yet I always sensed an emotional friction, the pressure to go back, to turn around. And the reason was simple. I'd finally fallen into an orbit. ■

Oakland Ross is a former foreign correspondent and author of *Guerrilla Beach*, Cormorant Books 1994. He is working on a book on the human spirit in Latin America and Africa to be published this year by Knopf.





Don't fence me in

The age-old rivalries between farmers and nomadic herders have taken on a dramatic new twist in the Sahel.

Karen Schoonmaker Freudenberg

reports from Senegal.

IN THE SPRING of 1991 hundreds of brightly-painted buses suddenly invaded Senegal's Mbeguë Forest from all directions. Wearing their distinctive patchwork garb, members of the country's *Mouride* Islamic brotherhood filled the air with singing and chanting. Following the orders of their leader, Serigne Mbacké, within a matter of weeks they cut down more than five million trees and brutally expelled more than 6,000 FulBe¹ pastoralists and 100,000 cattle from the forest. Two months later, the rains began: the once-lush pastures were ploughed under and the land planted with a vast plantation of peanuts.

The Mbeguë reserve lies in the Sahel, the transitional area between the vast ocean of desert in the Saharan north and the more fertile agricultural zones to the south. The Sahara and the northern Sahel have traditionally been the domain of nomadic

NOMADS

LAND LOSS

FulBe herder: 'Does a field have legs to walk when it gets thirsty?'

Nowhere is this more evident than in the Ferlo region of northern Senegal where FulBe pastoralists have lived with their hump-backed cattle since the fifteenth century. The Ferlo lies in the heart of the Sahel and covers much of the northern quarter of Senegal. To an outsider many of its wide expanses appear as desolate wastelands. Rainfall is both sparse and highly capricious. One hamlet may receive a drenching downpour while another five kilometres away remains bone dry. A village may have good rains one year followed by three or four years of drought.

The windswept Ferlo landscape is painted in shades of brown and grey and many of the trees are spiny, drought-resistant species easily mistaken for stunted bushes. The grasses beneath their spindly boughs appear dry and brittle. But the region's stark appearance belies the richness and complexity of its ecology, best understood by the FulBe.

The FulBe who live in the Ferlo are part of a large ethnic group that spreads across much of the Sahel. They grow a few subsistence crops but live mostly from the milk and meat of their cattle, sheep and goats. For them, the Ferlo has been a land of opportunity, rich in a multitude of grass and tree species that make excellent fodder for their animals. The key to their success has been their mobility. By practising a degree of nomadism, the FulBe have been able to adapt to whatever conditions nature serves up. Rather than waiting helplessly for rain that may never come, they seek out the productive pastures where rain has already fallen. Underlining the advantages of nomadism a young FulBe herder wryly asked: 'Does a field have legs to walk when it gets thirsty?'

At times when the entire Ferlo experiences drought the FulBe move out of the region altogether, driving their cattle further south into areas of higher rainfall. These more southern zones are inhabited by the Wolof and Serer people, who make their living primarily from agriculture. These areas are densely populated and the FulBe would have trouble finding grazing land for their cattle were it not for several protected forest regions. These reserves were created by the French colonists and maintained by later governments in order to preserve trees and protect the land from soil erosion. Farming was prohibited in the reserves though herders were allowed to graze their animals. In years when the rains don't come these reserves are havens for the FulBe as

they move south, serving as a kind of insurance policy for those who make their homes in the riskier climates to the north. The Mbeguë forest until it was decimated in 1991 was one of the most important of these reserves.

The FulBe are far less mobile now than they were 50 years ago. In the past, herders had to move their families out of the Ferlo each dry season when the watering holes dried up. Then, in the 1950s, the colonial government started to drill boreholes 200 to 300 metres into the aquifer. There is now a grid of wells, with pumping stations at 30-kilometre intervals. Water sloshes into giant cement tanks and then is siphoned into barrels for household needs. Nearby, animals congregate patiently to take their turns drinking from the long cement troughs fed from the tanks.

Elegant straw igloos

Since the installation of these boreholes many FulBe have set up semi-permanent camps or villages around the water sources. Most people remain there year-round while one or two men head out to accompany the cattle, guiding them from borehole to borehole depending on the availability of water and the quality of pastures in different areas.

Others practise 'micro-nomadism' – moving their camps of elegantly-functional straw igloos to more remote pasture areas when water is widely available, then returning to the boreholes during the dry season. In spite of this tendency to settle down, the FulBe still count on being able to move within the pastoral zones to good pastures and to leave the area to move south in years when there is drought.²

It is this mobility that is threatened as the grazing lands of the Ferlo are squeezed and compressed on all sides. The pressure comes from a variety of sources. To the north the Ferlo is bordered by the Senegal River. Traditionally the river's annual

herders whose colorful billowing caftans brighten the desert as they follow their cattle, sheep or goats in the constant quest for water and pasture. The southern Sahel and the tropics beyond are occupied largely by farmers whose carefully-tended crops create a patchwork of fields on land passed from generation to generation. Across the Sahel the lifestyles of pastoralists and farmers meet and often compete for the same land and water. Pastoralists need open spaces for extensive grazing. Farmers enclose their land, intensively cultivating their fields and taking great pains to ensure that animals are kept far from tempting grain or vegetable crops.

A windswept landscape

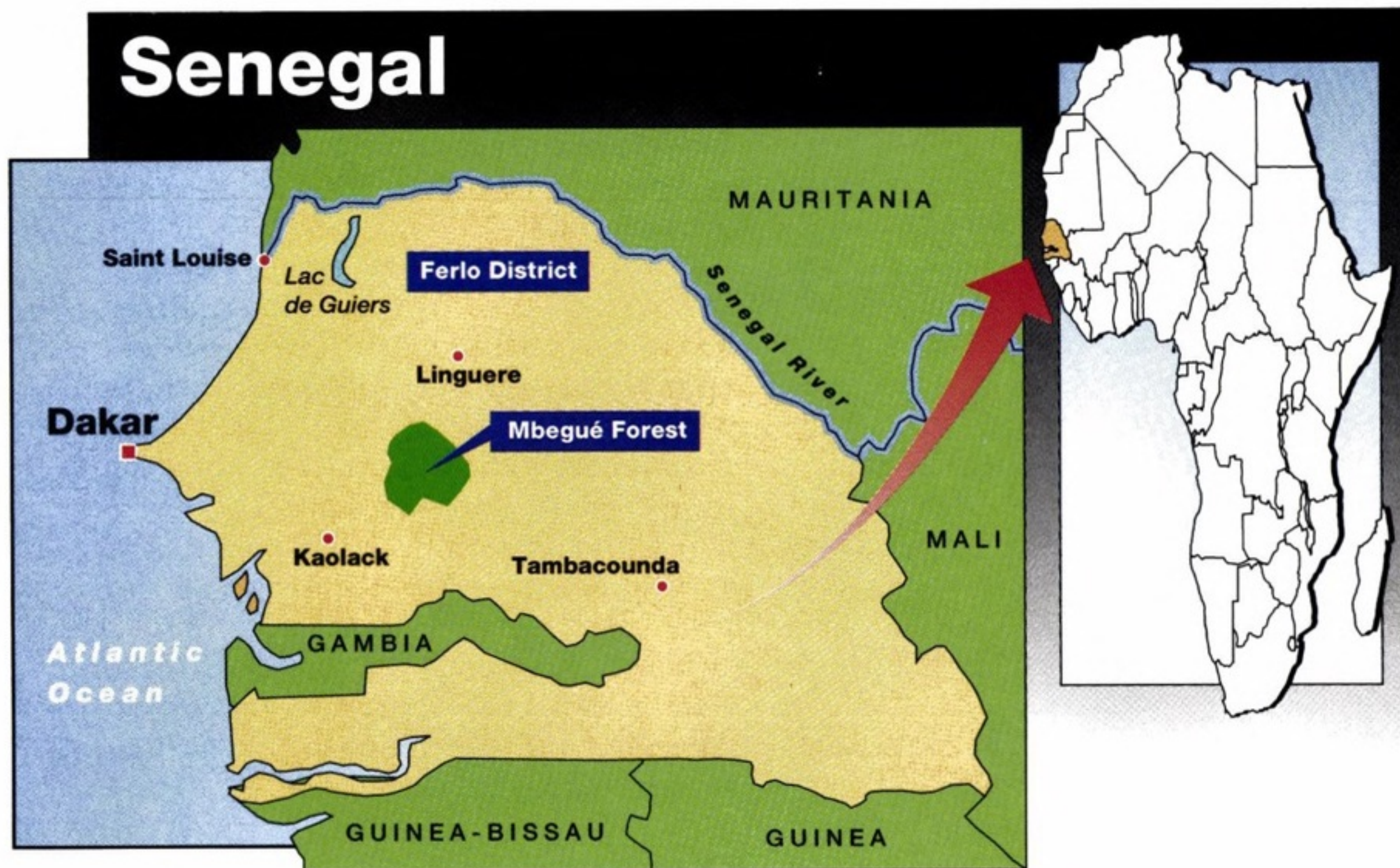
This competition for space is as old as the occupations themselves. But now it is intensifying as farmers expand into areas once exclusively used by pastoralists.

*...the region's stark appearance
belies the richness and complexity of its
ecology, best understood by the FulBe.*

flood nourished the fields and pastures of the FulBe who lived along its banks. In the 1980s two dams, one at Manantali in Mali and the other at Diama in Senegal, were built to support large-scale irrigation schemes. Because the land could now be irrigated it was taken over by wealthy farmers. As a result the FulBe were pushed deeper into the Ferlo.

To the west, former grazing lands have been turned into orchards and gardens whose high walls keep out both people and

PHOTO: JEREMY HARTLEY / PANOS PICTURES



animals. Water pumped from the shallow aquifer along Senegal's coast helps grow green beans, mangoes and strawberries. These lush gardens are owned by powerful religious leaders, Lebanese businessmen and other members of an élite based in the capital, Dakar. They serve both wealthy city dwellers and Europe's insatiable desire for fresh fruit and vegetables in winter.

To the south the issue is encroachment on so-called 'insurance pastures'. Forests like Mbegué are fiercely coveted by powerful interests seeking to expand peanut production. In 1991 the Government granted the Khalifa General (Supreme Head) of the Mouride Islamic Brotherhood permission to put to the plough more than 60 per cent of the Mbegué reserve. A year later (shortly before the national elections) the Mouride leader urged his followers to sup-

previously considered too dry for agriculture. Each year new fields are cleared around the boreholes, blocking access routes used by cattle as they move from one pasture area to another and creating bitter conflicts between herders and farmers. Much of the new settlement in the region is organized by the same Mouride sect that took over the Mbegué forest lands.

Erratic climate

Bureaucrats in the capital, Dakar, and others argue that concern for the FulBe's nomadic system is a sentimental attachment to an archaic way of life. And they point to the FulBe themselves, many of whom have abandoned pastoralism in favor of farming and ranching. But this misses the point. Nomadic grazing systems have evolved in response to erratic climates with limited rainfall. By moving from place to place in relation to the available resources the FulBe make optimal use of limited water resources and spread the impact of their activities more evenly over the environment.

The pastoral footprint is light on these fragile ecologies. Peanut farming is not. Peanuts were introduced by the French as a cash crop in the nineteenth century and later promoted by the independent Senegalese government as a critical source of foreign exchange. Local farmers like them because they're versatile: the nuts can be sold for cash, eaten in stews and sauces or pressed for cooking oil. In addition, the leaves and stems of the plant can be dried into hay for fattening sheep or feeding cows during the dry season. Many households earn nearly as much from peanut hay as from the nuts themselves.

Unfortunately, the crop is also a menace

to fragile environments based on sandy soils. When it is harvested the entire plant is uprooted, leaving neither organic matter to enrich the soil nor groundcover to protect the topsoil during the long dry season. The loose sand which remains is eroded at alarming rates as *harmattan* winds whip down from the Sahara.

Peanut damage

Small farmers with a few hectares of land make scrupulous efforts to combat the negative side of growing peanuts. They use sophisticated patterns of crop rotation, save as many trees as possible and fertilize the soil with cow and sheep manure. They can't stop the damage caused by peanut farming but they can at least slow down the process.

The powerful religious leaders and their followers are much less conscientious. Their farming practices mine the land, destroying trees and soils for short-term profit. On land like Mbegué, all trees are clear-cut and the stumps removed so that the fields can be ploughed. The plough blades churn up the sandy soils, which leaves barren expanses of denuded earth once the plants have been uprooted. When the soils have been exhausted, the Mourides move on. The area is left a wasteland where even grasses take years to regenerate.

Each new farm or plantation contributes to the relentless compression of grazing lands and reduces the FulBe's options for mobility – a critical element for their survival as pastoralists. Both the human and environmental costs of this transition are high. When the FulBe can no longer move their cattle in search of better pastures, they will be driven to a different kind of migration. A path which will take them to the crowded slums of Dakar.

Pastoralists like the FulBe play a critical role in the sustainable management of fragile ecosystems. Both Third World governments and aid agencies need to recognize this. The key is to work with local people to develop policies to protect grazing lands and nomadic rights where pastoralism is both more sustainable and more environmentally appropriate than farming. In Senegal they need to act quickly – or there won't be any pastures left to protect. ■

Karen Schoonmaker Freudenberger is a social scientist who works on environment and development issues in Africa. She lived in Senegal from 1974 to 1991.

¹ There are many subgroups of FulBe (also known as Fulani) in West Africa. The group in this article are the JeerinkooBe. ² In the first major Sahel drought (1972/73) following the FulBe settling around the boreholes, many families thought they could depend on the wells and not move south. They suffered tremendous loss of animals due to shortage of grass even when water was sufficient for drinking. In the next drought (1983) they revived their traditional strategies and moved south. They lost fewer livestock and recovered more quickly from the disaster.

As lands further south are degraded, farmers are tempted into areas considered too dry for agriculture.

port Abdou Diouf in his bid for re-election as President of Senegal.

Where rich pastures once flourished, the Mbegué forest is now carpeted by vast peanut plantations. The original Mbegué reserve had 38 water points suitable for watering animals; 35 of those were on fertile lands taken over by the Mourides. The Mbegué was the last important reserve remaining in the agricultural zone immediately south of the Ferlo.

But the pasture available to the FulBe is also being reduced by developments within the Ferlo itself. As lands further south are degraded and population pressures increase, farmers are tempted into areas

Desert storm

Cath Sanders reports from India where the massive Indira Gandhi Canal is changing the landscape and disrupting the life of the region's nomadic herders.

DAWN lights up the dun and sage landscape of Rajasthan's Thar Desert as hundreds of softly tinkling bells echo in the morning half-light. Scores of cattle and goats stream out of the sprawling village of Sui into the dunes, accompanied by men and boys swaddled in thick goatswool shawls insulating them from the freezing winter morning.

Cattle are the mainstay in this area of north-west India. The hardy *rathi* breed are well-suited to the sparse rainfall and the extremes of desert heat and cold. (The desert's name is taken from *thar*, the local word for butter.) The dry land is ill-suited to farming. Traditionally, most people here lived as semi-nomadic pastoralists. And many still do. They plant dryland crops like sorghum, lentils and chickpeas when the monsoon comes in late June. If they are lucky, they have fodder to feed their animals for the rest of the year. In dry years, or when the feed runs out, they migrate with their animals in search of pasture.

But this year the rains have been exceptionally good in western Rajasthan. The domed grain-stores are full and fodder is heaped up all over the village. The animals are fat and there is plenty of milk. Beside me a young woman tethers her cow to a small twisted tree. As her daughter drags away the calf, she washes the cow's udder and begins rhythmically squeezing milk into an aluminium pail.

I wander past thornbush corrals into a courtyard with honey-coloured walls rounded with smooth mud and cowdung plaster. Megha bai, an older woman, beckons me to sit. She herself rests on a string bed, warm-

ing herself in the sun, surrounded by her eight children. 'We keep animals but we grow crops too when the rains are good – *gower*, *bajri roti* and *moat* [millet and pulses].'

In the woodsmoke-filled room, Megha bai's daughter-in-law heats flat breads on a clay stove before spreading them

with butter from a brass pot.

'First we let the milk turn to curd and from that we make butter to sell,' she explains. The churn is a stick split into a whisk and tied to a bedpost with a leather pulley. *Chach*, the buttermilk left after churning is drunk with heavy millet bread, dripping with butter and a chutney of fiery ground chillies. 'And not just breakfast,' says Megha bai. 'This is what we eat three times a day: *bajri roti*, *ghee* and *chach*.' The day heats up and women go off to the

Morning chores: milk is a mainstay for villagers in the Rajasthan desert.



village well, their sequinned veils glittering like sunlight on water.

This way of life has gone on for centuries in Sui. But soon it may change. In a few years, a branch of the Indira Gandhi Canal will bring irrigation waters to the village. Partly funded by the World Bank, the vast project will cost an estimated \$3 billion by the time it is finished. In 30 years, the canal has dramatically transformed 500,000 hectares of the Thar. Just 30 kilometres away farmers stack bulging sacks of peanuts and cotton for market, surrounded by lush fields of mustard and wheat. You would scarcely believe you were in the middle of a desert.

But the pastoralists in Sui worry that new irrigated farmland will eat into their precious common grazing land. Already near the village disputes are beginning over what was once common pasture. Elsewhere herders have been denied land near the canal by authorities. Because they move away for a few months of each year with their animals they are not classed as permanent residents.

Rural development worker Anwar Ali admits that the canal has made it easier for people to get clean water. 'Previously women had to walk 15 to 20 kilometres to collect 30 litres of water,' he told me. 'That's a week's supply for a family of 10.' But, he says, settlers have cornered most of the prime land near the canal elsewhere. 'So little common pasture now remains that local people have switched from cattle to sheep, which aren't fussy about fodder.' Unfortunately, the loss of common pasture land has also led to over-grazing and soil erosion, accelerating the process of desertification. As much as 60 per cent of the Thar is now considered high risk; areas once covered with sparse desert grasses are quickly turning to dunes.

Irrigation is also causing salinization. A layer of hard gypsum under the soil makes much of the desert prone to water-logging. Only a few kilometres from green fields, bleached skeletons of trees stand in water-logged lakes. Critics now suggest up to half the most fertile irrigated land could be destroyed within 20 years.

Bashir Gopera, headman of a hamlet of a dozen households near Sui is apprehensive about the changes happening around him. His whitewashed house overlooks a bare plain where several pastoral migration routes intersect. 'We had 1000 cattle 20 years ago and then we only migrated during droughts,' he says. 'Now we have only 500 cattle but we must migrate every year. All the best grazing land has gone to farming.'

Cath Sanders works with the Leeds Development Education Centre and would like to thank the voluntary organization Urmul Trust in Rajasthan for help with this article.

NOMADS – THE FACTS

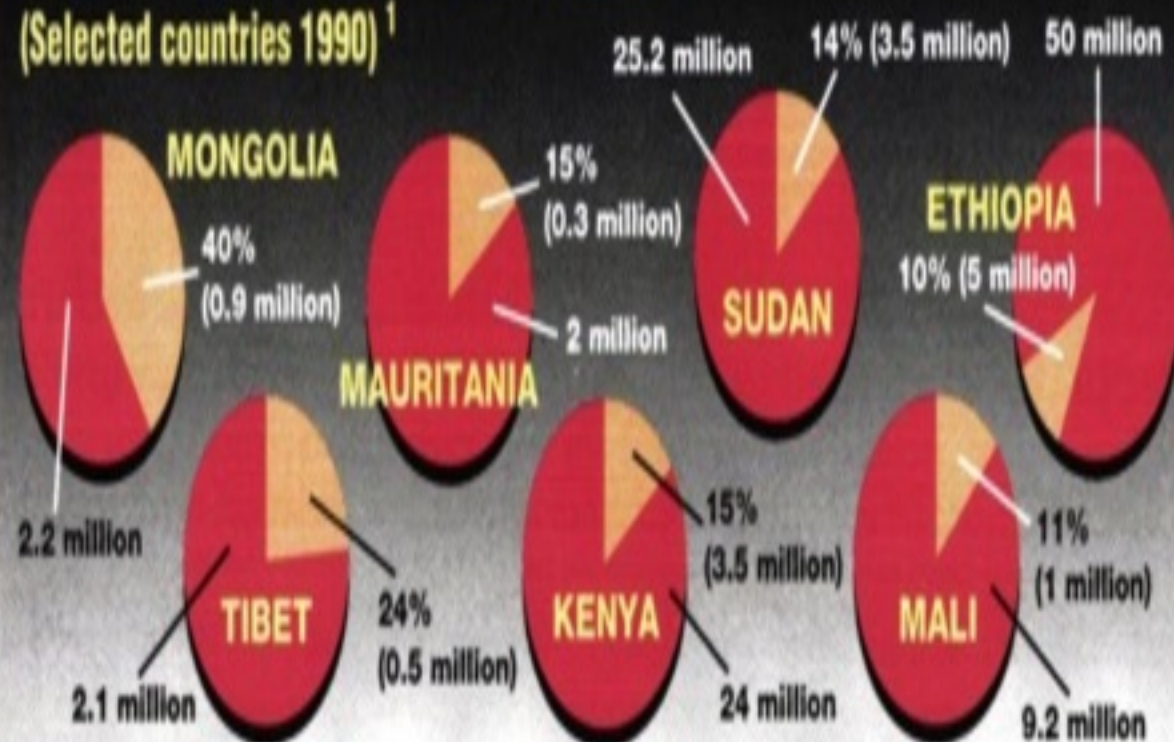


LIFE ON THE EDGE

The term nomadic is now a common metaphor for aimless wandering. In fact the movement of traditional nomadic peoples is far from haphazard: it is both predetermined and systematic. Most nomads live in marginal areas like deserts, steppes and tundra, where mobility becomes a logical and efficient strategy for harvesting scarce resources spread unevenly across wide territories.

TOTAL POPULATION NOMADIC PASTORALISTS

(Selected countries 1990)¹



■ Total population of country ■ Pastoralists as % of total population

WHO THEY ARE

There are three main groups of nomads:

Pastoralists The word 'nomad' is derived from the Greek word for pasture – *nomos*. Pastoral nomads move with their households in search of pasture for their animals. There are an estimated 30-40 million of them in the world. Livestock is central to their livelihood and the basis of their culture. Their movement is seasonal, linked to rainfall and the availability of good forage for their animals.

♦ Goat herders in the Peruvian Andes graze their animals on richer grasses at lower altitudes during the wet season, then move to higher altitudes during the dry season.²

♦ Of the 60,000 Sami in Scandinavia only 6,000 are still nomadic. They may migrate with their reindeer up to 300 kilometres from sheltered forests in the winter to coastal grasslands in the summer.³

Hunter-gatherers

Groups like the San of the Kalahari Desert, the Inuit of the Canadian Arctic, native people of the Amazonian rainforest and various hill tribes of Southeast Asia are nomadic in that they move in search of particular animals to hunt or foodstuffs to gather. These hunting cultures are now disappearing or changing under the influence of modern consumer society and the cash economy.

Traders and Craftworkers Other groups may have nomadic lifestyles although they are neither pastoralists nor hunter-gatherers. In the West the best known of these are the Rom or Gypsies, sometimes known as Travellers.

Originally from northern India, the Rom moved north-west about 1,000 years ago and scattered across Europe, working as petty traders, musicians, farm workers and day-labourers.



ANIMALS

Animal mythology and symbolism permeate all aspects of nomadic society. Animals provide milk, meat and blood for food; hides, hair, wool, horn and bone for clothing, shelter and tools; and dung for fuel and fertilizer. Nomads also use animals for transport, freight carriage and traction (milling, threshing and ploughing).

♦ The Bedouin of Saudi Arabia have a special vocabulary to describe their camels. The Arabic word for camel (*jamil*) comes from the same root as the word for beautiful (*jamil*).⁴

♦ In Somali, the word *raadraa* which means 'to track down animals' is now used to describe modern research. The word *layis* which means 'to tame a young camel' is also the term given to exercises in a student work book.⁵

♦ Mongols use different words to describe the age, colour and size of horses. The word *saaral* is used for a white horse, *ke'er* for a bay and *je'ered* for a reddish-brown steed.⁶

CATTLE AS CAPITAL

♦ Almost all English words for money come from the world of pastoral nomads.

Cattle, chattel and capital come from the same root. **Pecuniary** comes from the Latin word for cattle, *pecus*.⁷



THREAT TO MOVEMENT

Nomadic peoples face many threats today, but the most serious is the attempt to stop them moving around.

♦ Over the last 40 years the Raika camel nomads in Rajasthan, India, have lost access to half of the common lands previously used as pasture.⁸

♦ In Kenya, Government attempts to bring traditional Maasai lands under private title have ended up removing large areas of land from grazing. In some cases nearly half the land is now in the hands of non-Maasai.⁹

♦ In Inner Mongolia much of the best grazing land has been turned over to irrigated farming. With privatization nomads have to contract for the right to graze traditional lands. More and more are becoming semi-nomadic and even sedentary ranchers.¹⁰



SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

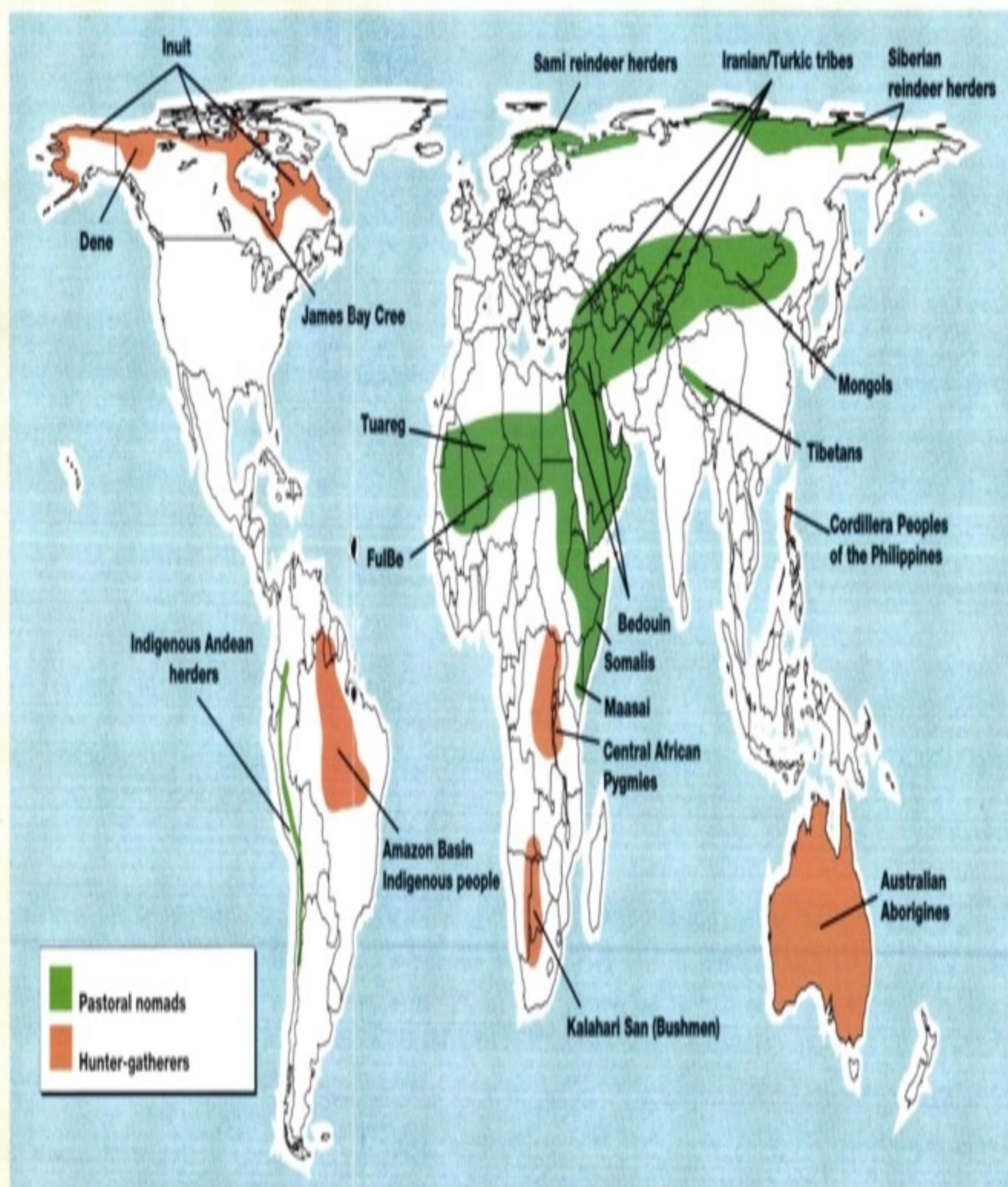
♦ **Mobility** Because nomads live in areas of climatic extremes they've had to be flexible and opportunistic. Mobility allows them to profit from widely-dispersed resources whose availability varies from year to year.

♦ **Mixed Economies** Pastoral nomads raise several kinds of animals: usually one large prestigious species and several smaller animals like goats and sheep. Disease or drought affects each species differently, thus increasing the nomads' chances of survival. They also combine animal raising with small-scale farming, fishing, petty trading or migrant labour. And though nomads are subsistence-oriented, they have strong commercial skills, trading or selling animal hides, milk and meat in exchange for grain, tea and modern consumer goods.¹¹

♦ **Tribal Sharing** Most nomadic peoples are organized into tribes or clans which have a customary claim over a specific territory. Tribal elders control who has access to common property like water, pasture, game or wild foodstuffs. Outsiders have to ask permission if they want to use resources on land which traditionally belongs to another group. Strong tribal identities are also one way pastoral nomads have of banding together to defend their livestock against theft by their neighbours.



MAIN NOMADIC PEOPLES BY REGION¹¹



¹ Nil estimates compiled from *Nomads at the Crossroads*, UNESCO, 1989 and various other sources. ² *Nomadic Peoples*, Commission on Nomadic Peoples, No 28, Uppsala, 1991. ³, ⁴, ⁶ *Nomads*, Peter Carmichael, Collins and Brown, London, 1991. ⁵ *Aman, The Story of a Somali Girl*, Janice Boddy and Virginia Lee Barnes, Bloomsbury, London, 1994. ⁷ *Beyond Beef, The Rise and Fall of Cattle Culture*, Jeremy Rifkin, Dutton/Penguin, 1992. ⁸, ⁹, ¹⁰ *Nomadic Peoples*, Commission on Nomadic Peoples, No 30 1992 & No 33 1993, Uppsala. ¹¹ *Nomads and the Outside World*, AM Khazanov, Cambridge University Press, 1982.



Americans see themselves as a society literally on the move. **David Watson** looks at how this nomadic urge was born and explores its impact on both the land and the people.

the On road to nowhere

'After all this long journey... here it was all come to nothing, everything all busted up and ruined.' *Huckleberry Finn*

LOOKING TO CHANGE my life, at the age of 19 I decided to pack my belongings into a knapsack and hitch-hike to California. Two miraculous rides carried me through prairies, deserts and mountains into Los Angeles to a friend's place at the edge of Hollywood. In those days California was considered the ultimate destination for every dream of freedom and opportunity, spiritual and economic.

In one sense, I was following an east-to-west pattern. It is said that 60 per cent of

US citizens arrived through the immigration centre at Ellis Island in New York Harbour, or are descended from relatives who came via the same route. We Americans are thought to be rootless escapees from every other continent – nomadic, free spirits who get ourselves going when the going gets tough – pulling up stakes and moving on to the next ridge or mountain top, the next adventure. The country is billed as a 'Promised Land', a nation of immigrants who made good.

Movement and migration, always a large part of the human experience, have taken on a dramatically different character since early modern times. The rapid pace, enormous dimensions and universal perma-

nence of movement have become characteristic of what is now a global urban-industrial civilization. The European invasion of America essentially financed the emergence of capitalism. In the process, old cultures were entirely uprooted, indigenous peoples slaughtered and displaced and whole regions pillaged.

It was the *un*-settling of Europe, social critic Lewis Mumford once remarked, that brought about the settlement of America. Those who came here were themselves uprooted, detribalized people. Settlement was itself vastly unsettling, what writer Frederick Turner called 'a spiritual story...of a civilization that had substituted history for myth as a way of understanding life'.

NOMADS

FRONTIER SPIRIT

Turner recalls finding himself in the Black Hills of South Dakota, the sacred *Paha Sapa* of the Lakota Sioux. In a sudden flash he recognized how utterly estranged he was from the place, how it could never have the same deep meaning for him as for the Lakota – not because of the amount of time they have been there but for the way they have lived there.

According to Turner, the West's turn from cyclic myth to an obsession with linear time (and hence with geographic expansion to fulfil its history) underlies the frenzied outward movement of Western society in general and American civilization in particular. The archaic myth of traditional peoples, which we might visualize as a circle, was transformed into a new mystique of history: a single line, an ever-receding horizon. This turn toward history banished the sacred from nature, making the Europeans 'alienated sojourners' whose only outlet was 'the restless drive onward'. Such spiritual repression inevitably brought colossal levels of violence towards the world they encountered. The westward wanderers' testimonies of 'lavish and exhaustless' abundance, says Turner, were also narratives 'of waste, destruction, and frantic despoliation'.

Frontier redemption

Ambivalence toward the land set the tragic conditions of the American experience. The sentimental idea of paradise – a lush, abundant garden – had its corollary in the image of an immense threatening wilderness. Incapable of loving the land for what it was, the invaders had to 'improve' it, pulverizing and reconstituting everything in their path. That acute observer of early American society, Alexis de Tocqueville, likened their advance to a march: 'turning the course of rivers, peopling solitudes and subduing nature'.

De Tocqueville noted the tendency of early nineteenth century Americans to abandon a homestead before even finishing

the roof. The settler typically was sustained by the idea that the frontier – a middle ground between corrupt civilization and chaotic wilderness – would bring redemption. Of course, the utopian urge for movement and change also reflected a profound desire for a stable home and roots. Furthermore, connected as they were to the American commitment to markets, these desires were paradoxical. The market system, based as it is on abstract economic exchange, is inherently destabilizing and must ultimately undermine any roots that have been set down. Thus each frontier was eventually exhausted and abandoned by the same forces which caused it to be settled in the first place.

Official history says the devastation of the original lands and peoples was a necessary evil to bring about a vital civilization. So deeply ingrained is this mystique that a 1992 exhibit on the quincentennial of Columbus at Washington's Smithsonian Institute was severely censured – simply for referring to the genocide brought by the conquest. The pioneer ideology, a New World version of holocaust denial, is still very much alive. Every US child grows up with it. Davy Crockett, Daniel Boone and early TV shows like *Bonanza* and *Gunsmoke* provided my generation's archetypal heroes: larger-than-life men bringing light to the darkness. We grew up on them, immersed ourselves in the blue light of their ideological shadow play.

Daniel Boone was the prototypical US folk hero. His characteristic misanthropy and urge to escape to the frontier became a familiar theme in American popular culture, from Huck Finn's meander down the Mississippi to Beat novelist Jack Kerouac's pilgrimage west in *On the Road*. Boone's statement that he left 'domestic happiness... to wander through the wilderness of America in quest of the country of Kentucke' reveals the pre-eminently masculine aspect of the American nomadic mystique. In this story, men abandon 'domestic happiness' for the 'Great Adventure'. Throughout the Boone tale, a sexually-charged ambivalence toward the

land is visible – his yearning for the 'virgin wilderness' and his fear and loathing toward the actual place and the people already living there.

In *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Empire-Building and Indian-Hating*, historian Richard Drinnon reveals

Boone as a land speculator who 'went in for body counts' of enemy dead. 'We burnt them all to ashes,' writes Boone in a typical account – linking him both to earlier and future wars against America's indigenous people. 'We entirely destroyed their corn and other fruits and everywhere spread a scene of desolation.' Indeed, desolation is the public secret underlying the Euro-American pursuit of happiness.

If Boone and his ilk were the tools of real-estate promoters, no less was that hero of heroes, the cowboy. This profession drew little attention until the cowboy was concocted as an heroic figure by Buffalo Bill Cody for his *Wild West Show* at the end of the last century. By the time Cody had finished, the cowboy was synonymous

Incapable of loving the land the invaders had to 'improve' it, pulverizing everything in their path.

with America. Even the first celebrity cowboy, Cody's protégé Buck Taylor, had become an actor. Since then actors from John Wayne to Ronald Reagan have come to supplant reality. The myth firmly established, the Wild West has become a gargantuan, lucrative theme for the culture industry.

Cowboy-inspired clothing is ubiquitous; upscale customers can even buy blue jeans said to have once been worn by 'authentic' cowboys. The paraphernalia and symbols are employed not only to sell products like tobacco, alcohol and automobiles, but to market the macho, individualistic and superficially-independent mode of life that, as we are frequently reminded, makes the country great. There is now even a 'cowboy' channel on national cable television for the devoted. Quips country singer Bobby Bare: 'Today, being a cowboy is more an attitude than an occupation.'

Cow factory

In those days the cowboy industry was just another get-rich-quick scheme for the same settlers who first annihilated tens of millions of buffalo to starve out the natives before introducing livestock grazing. 'Forage fever' was like gold fever or oil fever, with predictable results: grazing rivals, or surpasses, any other single factor in the ecological destruction of the American West. As Lynn Jacobs writes in *The Waste of the West*, our real national totem should be the cow, not the eagle. One half of all US land outside Alaska is grazed by livestock, mostly cattle, with another 15 per cent used as cropland to feed livestock. Half the water and 40 per cent of all plant food production goes to

Saddle up and pray: cowboy/girl culture is at the core of the American identity.



PHOTOS: PAUL FUSCO / MAGNUM (ABOVE LEFT); JACK KURTZ / IMPACT VISUALS (BELOW LEFT)



The wreckage of industrial America:
'too busy moving on.'

PHOTO: MARILYN HUMPHRIES / IMPACT VISUALS

livestock. The country is a veritable cow factory. In the process grasslands, brushlands, forests and deserts have been despoiled. According to US Department of Agriculture estimates, Western rangelands are only about half as botanically productive as they were before the livestock invasion of the 1880s. But cattlemen have had more than an environmental effect.

After massacring the natives, they consolidated huge land holdings through theft and coercion. Since then, despite their small numbers, they have dominated state and federal governments, fostering a 'frontier justice' based on intimidation and violence. In the recent Texas election for

... today's restless 'nomad' moves along a receding horizon, wrecking along the way, never at home.

Governor, Democratic and Republican candidates ran on who would execute more criminals the most swiftly. The Republican, a son of George Bush, claimed the higher number and won. Cowboy justice seems more popular than ever in the US today.

The range war is in fact an apt replica of aggressive capitalism, its fundamental war-of-all-against-all. The shoot-out and the hostile corporate buy-out are linked spiritually, certainly symbolically, frequently right down to the western clothing worn by both sets of protagonists. Of course, the cattle barons are now often multinationals or giant eastern insurance companies. Despite the myth's images of neighborliness, community in the American west is mostly an aggregate, dominated by the powerful: atomized individuals, 'alienated sojourners' relentlessly whipping and stripping the countryside to scrape off a profit. After being pushed onto reservations and seeing the land suffer under the onslaught of white invaders the Navajos believed their region to be literally bewitched. Anyone who has seen the hysteria on the floor of the commodities exchange, or its result on the landscape, might agree.

NOMADS

FRONTIER SPIRIT

The romance of the horizon is a mirage concealing the boom-bust and subsequent dust-bowls of the market. Restless and unsentimental, capital must constantly abandon yesterday's faded paradise to conquer the next or face collapse. The frontier is always somewhere else. In the beginning, the Indians were driven out with the justification that because they were nomadic, they could lay no claim to the land they occupied. But what came after was fragmentation, not stability, and a contempt for the land still visible in ugly Alaska frontier towns, the denuded industrial landscapes of the Rust Belt and rural lands everywhere obliterated for 'development'.

Sacred circle

Looking honestly at the movements of indigenous peoples, we would mostly see a peregrination based on a profound awareness of and ability to live with the land, not against it. Traditional nomads move in a kind of sacred circle, or perhaps an ellipse; in their stories and migrations they return to the source and centre of the world.

In contrast, today's restless 'nomad' moves along a line, following a receding horizon, wrecking and abandoning along the way, never at home, always scheming the next move across shifting, breaking ice. Or maybe the movement is a circle, but it now goes from nowhere to nowhere, around and around like the subway line or the circulation of money. One thinks of De Tocqueville's prescient comment that in America life was 'always changing, but it is monotonous, because all these changes are alike'.

It may be the singular genius of the country of my birth to turn every unique setting into the same monotonous place. The grid plan of early American towns was designed to facilitate land transactions. Now the grid is inescapable and everywhere one encounters the same sterile housing development, strip mall, 'industrial park' or cleared hillside.

Early in our history the romance of the landscape shifted to the machine. The railroad and telegraph were destined to 'annihilate space and time', according to common parlance. As the physical setting was indeed annihilated, wild nature lost its power to dominate the imagination (except increasingly as the site for automobile advertising) and only the machine remains. Today's post-modern nomad channel surfs or wanders in cyberspace, no longer worrying about the world outside or even believing it exists. Consumerism delivers paradise; the miracles of abundance no longer come from loamy earth but from genetic engineering, space flight and the media.

Yet the frontier idea still elicits loyalty, especially in the high-tech, mid-sized

towns and rural areas of the west and the Sun Belt, where nationalistic, conservative, fundamentalist Christian forces are strongest. There the old myths have found new vigor in a weird but potent mix of frontier and 'new age' values. Where the middle class is no longer fascinated by the pioneer spirit, it chases Indian shadows in 'new age' healing rituals fashioned from the purloined fragments of native religion. During the Gulf War millions of Americans thronged to the film *Dances With Wolves*, a white man's romance about living among the Lakota, while the contemporary cavalry incinerated more recently demonized 'savages' in Iraq. But the essential question 'who are we?' remains unanswered. We're too busy moving on.

Like many Americans my family has now been scattered to the winds. So it should be no surprise that I began this article on an airplane headed to Hawaii to visit my mother. She moved there 25 years ago to work and then stayed. Over the last quarter of a century Hawaii has provided a stunning lesson in the effects of our special nomadism. A small, exquisitely beautiful place stolen from its original inhabitants, it continues to undergo changes both rapid and horrendous. 'Development' is turning it into part Southern California and part Detroit. As I drove from the airport this time, I noticed a huge new K-Mart encroaching on a bird sanctuary. By the edge of the parking lot stood a beautiful white egret poking through debris for food, looking like a homeless person at a trash bin.

They were 'careless people,' Fitzgerald's protagonist Nick Carraway concludes in *The Great Gatsby*: 'They smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together and let other people clean up the mess they had made.' I know the defiled wilderness has also become a common cultural motif. In certain post-modern circles, being 'on the road to nowhere', as the *Talking Heads* song goes, is even counted as a blessing, however precarious. But our wandering comes at a great price – to egrets and to people. Throughout it all, we remain foreigners – in America and elsewhere.

It's true we can't go back to sacred circles long lost. We're already torn from our roots. But space and time have not yet been altogether annihilated: it still may be possible to find out where we've been, where we really are, to recognize the integrity of the place and what it has lived. It's time to start cleaning up our mess, to 'grasp rock and soil', as Lakota writer Luther Standing Bear put it. It's time to come home. ■

David Watson is a writer and teacher who lives in Detroit.



**'The whole world hates us,
they've chased us away,
they've sworn at us,
they've condemned us to
wander for life.'**

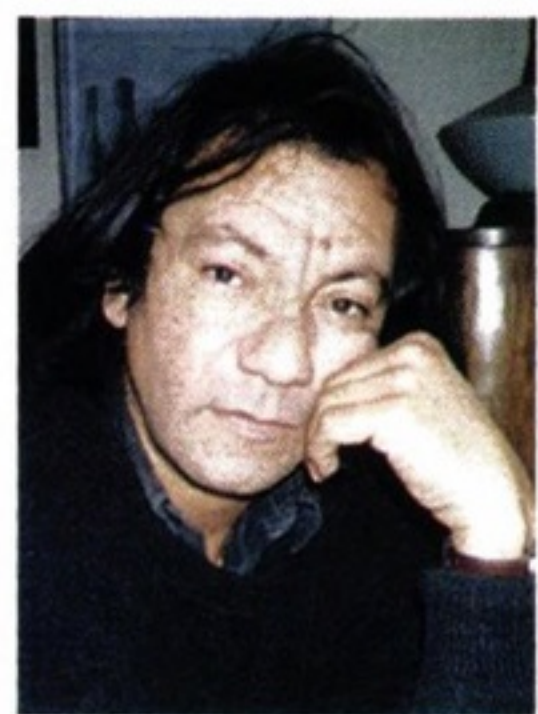
*– Lyrics from a song sung by this
Hungarian Gypsy girl in Tony
Gatlif's film.*

PHOTO: N. BERTHERAT / SYGMA

History's scapegoats

Roger Morier talks to

Gypsy filmmaker Tony Gatlif



about his
search for
his people's
identity.

'WHEN I started in cinema in the 1970s, I didn't think I would make films about my past, or about my people. I only wanted to get close to beautiful women.'

Tony Gatlif slumps into the red vinyl bench of a busy Latin Quarter café. His weathered face and long, jet-black hair disappear behind a thin cloud of blue smoke from the *Gauloises* he is chain-smoking.

'Then later, people would ask me "Who

are you? Where do you come from?" And I didn't know what to say.'

Those questions started Gatlif on a long journey of self-discovery – travels which led him to meet fellow-Gypsies from Germany and Spain to Romania and Algeria. Everywhere he found the same open arms, the same music and common life-style. He also became increasingly angry.

'If people really knew what Gypsies were like, they wouldn't judge them with the prejudices that have been around for

centuries – as child-snatchers and chicken thieves.'

It was then he decided to make a film focusing on Gypsy music – even if that music often sings of persecution. In the midst of their hardship, says Gatlif, it is their *joie de vivre* and their music which gives Gypsy people the strength to carry on.

'You really have to *want* to live to resist centuries of persecution and hardship,' notes Gatlif. 'I wanted to make a film the Rom people could be proud of, not something to exhibit their misery. I wanted to produce a hymn to this people that I love.'

The result was *Latcho Drom*. Released in France in the fall of 1993, Gatlif's film was hugely popular. The Paris daily *Libération* described it as a 'sumptuous

film' which 'marries and magnifies an emblematic cause'. It is certainly an unusual film in that it is neither documentary nor fiction. There is no dialogue, no narration and no sub-titles to explain what is going on.

Instead there is a musical odyssey which follows the route of the Gypsies from Rajasthan in northwestern India through Egypt, Turkey, Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, France and finally, Spain. In each location song or dance, or both, are used to set a scene, tell a story, reveal a truth. And everywhere in the music is the memory of persecution.

From the bright blue and crimson skirts of a Gypsy girl whirling in the Rajasthan desert, to the flamenco wail of a Spanish woman, the plight of the Gypsies is pre-

sented in its gritty reality. But the film is not without optimism.

'Gypsy people are optimistic,' says Gatlif. 'They have to be. How else would they survive? They have been persecuted for a thousand years. They have learned that, when something bad happens you deal with it, maybe you weep, but then you move on – you don't stop.' The Gypsy people only want to be left alone, he claims. They have long ago given up any illusion of settling down somewhere.

'The Rom people aren't looking for a country. They just want the right to live for a time in the areas they are passing through. The time to allow a woman to give birth to a child, to let horses or cattle rest, to wait out a winter. Everybody in this world has their place. The Gypsies want theirs, too.'

The Maasai and the Travellers

Nikki van der Gaag meets three people whose nomadic background gives them more in common than they ever imagined.

'WELCOME, BROTHER, WELCOME – we thought you'd be taller.' A woodfire gives out gusts of warmth as we crowd inside the trailer. Everything is spotless, ornate. Patterned china gleams through polished glass cupboards. Crocheted covers neatly conceal two ghetto-blasters. And everywhere there are mirrors that seem to reflect and expand our encounter.

This is an unusual meeting, a conversation arranged between Peter, a Maasai from Kenya and two British Travellers (Gypsies). Sakie and Anna live in a trailer in the middle of an industrial area in the city of Leeds.

They are here because they are interested in each other's traditions. Although they come from different countries, the Maasai and the Travellers are both nomads. Both face prejudice from the larger society around them and both live in cultures undergoing tremendous change. But the meeting is also a gamble: they may have nothing to say to each other. There may be just too many differences for any shared feelings or experiences to emerge.

The talk begins slowly, tentatively, with the awkwardness of people who have never met before. Peter explains a little about his people in Kenya: 'We Maasai are slowly

being forced into a lifestyle not our own. The Government wants to stop us from moving around and is annexing our land. And there is a lot of prejudice against pastoralists in general and Maasai in particular. People still think of Maasai as not friendly, as lazy and not wanting to change. They do not treat us as equals. When I walk down the street someone will call out "Hey, Maasai", instead of addressing me politely.'

Sakie nods his head. 'I can remember when I was five or six. We pulled off the road a few miles outside of town and were pelted with stones,' 'Yes,' adds Anna, 'even now, it is harder for us to get work than for 'house-people'. I went for a job packing light-bulbs recently and the manager said: "Phone me on Friday. I'm sure you've got the job." When I phoned he told me they'd given the job to someone else. But I knew a girl there and she told me it wasn't true. It was simply that he had found out where I lived – he found out I was a Traveller and didn't want to give me a job.' She hesitates for a moment and then adds with a smile and a wry laugh: 'But there's good and bad in everyone, isn't there? I got another job in the end – packing popcorn!'

From this point on the discussion really takes off. From discrimination they move to tradition and their beliefs about land. 'To the Maasai,' says Peter, 'land is life. But we don't believe in individual ownership. Land belongs to everyone.'

Sakie agrees. 'Nobody says, "This is mine and this is yours." Travellers' land is mostly government-owned anyway. We wouldn't normally buy land but if we do, it belongs to the whole extended family.' Both cultures emphasize the extended family and the support that this provides. As Anna puts it, 'If anything happens, there is someone about.' And they also find similarities in their attitudes to animals as an essential part of life. For the Maasai, says Peter, 'without animals, life isn't worth living'. 'Yes, that's right,' says Sakie with a flash of recognition. He looks at me and with a contented sigh confides, 'Oh, I can listen all day to what this man says.'

There is then an animated discussion about different meats and ways of preparing them. Sakie suddenly becomes very serious. 'Do you cook the sheep's bag?' Peter looks puzzled. 'Bag?' 'You know, the bag that is the stomach of the sheep, with the grass and all in it.' (At this

Peter, Sakie and Anna:
'They do not treat us
as equals.'



PHOTO: NIKKI VAN DER GAAG

NOMADS

PREJUDICE

Recognition and respect are a luxury they've never had. Continually harassed, Gypsies have been history's scapegoats. Hitler and Ceaucescu were part of a long line of those whose hate has propelled Gypsy wandering. A hate which today smacks of the Middle Ages.

Gatlif runs his hand through his hair and pauses for a moment, barely containing his rage: 'Last year in Transylvania an entire village of Gypsies, 40 houses, was burned to the ground. Five people died and the rest took shelter in the forest, living there for a week, before other Gypsies took them away. This came after a dispute with a neighbouring village of non-Gypsies. They burned their houses and chased them into the forest.'

What did the Romanian authorities do?

'Nothing – why should they? The Gypsies have no political power. To be seen to be helping them would be turned against any government. And not only in Romania, it's the same everywhere in Eastern Europe. In Romania, in Turkey, in Hungary, there are no human rights for Gypsies. People can do what they want to them.'

The lot of the Gypsies is scarcely better elsewhere. Every few months in France, there is another incident involving Gypsy families being chased away by small-town authorities who are worried that the nomads will settle down and bring with them what one local politician called 'all the misery of the world'.

Gatlif speaks passionately about his people whom he says are perpetually rejected by others. 'Gypsies pass through

an area and they are treated like vermin, like lice. I've heard about people burning the ground where Gypsies have camped.'

In the Rom language *Latcho Drom* means 'have a safe journey'. Watching the film, listening to Tony Gatlif, you want to say 'safe journey' to all the musicians on the screen, all the Gypsies in the world.

Because at the end of it all, everyone knows that the Gypsies' journey is one of exclusion, abandonment and solitude. Music attenuates this and gives the Gypsy people an identity; something which Tony Gatlif sees as essential: 'After all, their identity is the only country the Rom people possess.'

Roger Morier is a freelance journalist living and working in Paris, France.

UNITY IN LANGUAGE

The term 'Gypsy' is still widely used, even by Gypsy people themselves. However it is gradually being replaced by other words less tinged by racism and prejudice. In the UK Gypsies are often known as 'Travellers'. But the preferred term is 'Rom', which means 'the people' in Romany, the Gypsy language.

The Rom are divided into tribes or

nations; each tribe is divided into clans and each clan is made up of a number of related families. The European tribes include the Gitanos of Spain, the Manouche of France, the Romnichals of Britain, the Royash of Romania and the Rom of Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Most Rom speak some form of Romany, an Indo-European language with clear links to Sanskrit.



PHOTO: N. BERTHERAT / SYGMA

the Maasai of the past. But we need help to understand the change rather than having it imposed upon us. If the development process does not support the environment in which we live it will be a disaster. We need to change at our own pace.'

Every now and then during the discussion Sakie injects another excited question along the lines of: 'What do they call so-and-so in your language, brother?' Peter, with a smile that lights up his whole face, slowly answers. Usually, inevitably, the language is completely different. But occasionally Sakie can recognize a word, even if it means something different. The final triumph comes when he asks Peter the word for 'tea'. Peter answers that tea came to the Maasai from India and that his people use the Indian word *chai*. Sakie slaps his broad legs. 'But that's the same as us.' Sakie leans back, satisfied. He would be on the next plane to Kenya if anyone offered him the chance.

point Anna and I, both vegetarians, exchange grimaces.) 'Yes! We do! We cook it with herbs and...' Peter goes into a long explanation of how the Maasai cook it. Sakie frowns 'Yes, well it doesn't sound very different from the way we do it. It's delicious, isn't it? You could try it next time with a few potatoes and carrots and onions.'

By now Sakie is thoroughly intrigued. He explains how important tradition is to him, how he sees himself as a guardian of the old ways of his people, the Calderash. 'In olden times we came over with horses. That's how we used to make our living. The Calderash came from India thousands of years ago. We're an old tribe. Before my ancestors came here, after they left India, they travelled every bit of the world. I can still speak Sanskrit, though it is very old Sanskrit. That's the language I inherited. Can you spell Calderash for them, Anna? You see, Anna has learned to read and write but I never did.'

The talk turns to governments and state-supplied services. Governments in both Britain and Kenya would prefer the Maasai and the Travellers to settle down. They're unwilling to provide basic services to people who may simply pull up stakes and move on. Travellers for example have a reputation for leaving their garbage lying around. As I watched Anna neatly put tea-bags into a plastic bag I thought of all the plastic bags my own household generates each week. So how do Travellers deal with rubbish when there is no regular garbage collection, I wondered? The answer was simple: 'We burn it. But you can imagine if one morning without warning we are told by the authorities to move. Fetching children from school and packing up becomes more of a priority than burning rubbish.'

Sakie feels that things have improved for Travellers since he was a child. But he is phlegmatic about the future: 'We've lived for generations like this. But all good things come to an end. I think my grandchildren will be living in houses. I shall try and pass on our traditions to my child, but I don't think they will last forever. Young people need to make their own choices. The only thing is, I don't know how we will earn a living in houses because we need a bit of empty land around us to do the kind of work we do – scrap-dealing and the like.'

Peter nods in agreement. 'Change is inevitable among the Maasai too,' he admits. 'Cultural values are changing. The Maasai of the future will be different from

SIMPLY...

Perils of privatization

1. 'THEM' AND 'US'

ALL THROUGH HISTORY NOMADS have been looked down on by both farmers and city dwellers. They have little respect for national borders and they're hard to tax because they keep moving around. There has always been pressure to make *them* like *us*, to force them to settle down, put up fences and raise their cattle on ranches. Otherwise, the theory goes, their mania for large herds would lead to overgrazing and then famine.



4. NATIONALIZATION

MOST AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS NATIONALIZED LAND during colonial times to make parcels available to white settlers. After independence (with encouragement from foreign funders and their own Western-trained bureaucrats) governments initiated grandiose schemes to bring large chunks of grazing land under direct state control.

These efforts have proved disastrous. In Mali the Government nationalized the inland delta of the Niger River in the early 1960s – ignoring the sophisticated pastoral tenure system which already existed. Before nationalization some 30 areas were managed by various sub-clans of the Fulani people. There were reciprocal grazing rights allowing each group access to pastures as yearly floodwaters fell. And there were clear rules for strangers wanting to use the area. After nationalization the traditional system collapsed into a kind of free-for-all. Now, any citizen can graze cattle on the delta and government managers are easily bribed. As a result pastures are constantly over-grazed. Having lost control of lands which they traditionally managed the nomads have no choice but to increase their herds and graze them whenever and wherever they can.

5. PARKS VERSUS PEOPLE

NOMADS ALSO LOSE grazing lands when governments carve out national parks and game reserves. Local people are kept out on the grounds that they will destroy the wildlife and annoy the tourists.

Creating protected islands for wildlife has meant wholesale relocation of some communities. When the Ik, nomadic hunter-gatherers from the Kidepo Valley in Uganda, were evicted to make Queen Elizabeth National Park they were forced to become farmers in a region where both the land and the climate were completely unfamiliar.

The result? The community is now in tatters and disease and starvation are widespread. When Zakouma National Park was created in Chad in the early 1960s, thousands of Sahelian nomads were prevented from using key dry season pastures, thus putting more pressure on delicate grazing lands to the north.

2. DEVELOPMENT DOGMA

THIS PREJUDICE was given theoretical form in the late 1960s by US ecologist Garrett Hardin. The focus was Africa, and Hardin called it the 'tragedy of the commons'.

The real problem with nomadic pastoralists, Hardin argued, was a lack of private ownership of grazing land: since the land was owned by everyone, it was in reality owned by no-one. As a result, herders would follow their own self-interest by adding as many animals as possible to their herds. Individuals would benefit while the cost to the depleted resource base would be borne by everyone. The inevitable result? A 'tragic' movement towards overgrazing and desertification.

3. PRIVATE PROPERTY

THE DIRECT RESULT of the 'tragedy of the commons' theory was that governments attempted to settle nomads 'for their own good'. One way was to sell off communal lands to private owners through enforced land registration and titling programmes. Seeing private property as the 'solution' to the nomad problem conveniently fitted the free-market ideology of big aid agencies like USAID, the FAO and the World Bank. Millions of dollars were poured into these schemes – with dire results. In Botswana privatization has led to a new wealthy élite monopolizing water sources, increasing their share of the national herd and controlling the best grazing areas.



6. SETTLING DOWN

MOST GOVERNMENTS AROUND THE WORLD are still trying to turn nomads into farmers – with dismal results. Part of Tanzania's infamous *ujamaa* experiment was the attempt to force nomads into villages attached to particular communal grazing areas. By creating rigid boundaries and ignoring customary arrangements herders are cut off from distant pastures and waterholes they might need to use during times of drought.

New land tenure arrangements have also resulted in nomads losing traditional lands to powerful outsiders: wealthy élites, officials and government agencies.

7. LEARN FROM THE LOCALS

WE KNOW TODAY that Hardin was wrong. Far from destroying the land, nomads had worked out an ideal way of maximizing yields from scarce resources in an environmentally-sustainable manner.

The traditional approach to land ownership of most nomadic pastoralists in Africa was both complex and creative, a direct result of the unpredictability of rainfall.

In general nomadic peoples did not own the land as individuals. Instead pastureland was a community-controlled resource where individuals were entitled to use common land for their own benefit as long as the overall interests and survival of the community were not endangered.

This was a tremendously flexible system that allowed maximum use of the land at the same time as protecting the environment. Animal numbers were closely matched to available forage and water.

Mobility is critical to the nomads' productive and non-destructive use of the land. It is when this is impeded that the real problems start.

PHOTO: PETER CARMICHAEL / ASPECT

A woman wearing a vibrant, patterned dress with yellow, black, and red geometric designs is herding a large flock of white goats. The scene is set in a dry, open landscape under a clear sky. The woman is positioned in the middle ground, looking down at the goats. The goats are in the foreground, filling the lower half of the frame.

NOMADS

ANIMALS

Dreams, symbols and totems

Animals have a social and a sacred significance to all nomads. **John Galaty** looks at how they both mediate and inform the world view of herders and hunters.

THIS PAST DECEMBER near Vallon, Pont d'Arc in southern France, local caving enthusiasts stumbled across one of the most significant archaeological finds of the century. Sweeping their helmet lights down a narrow cave they were astonished to find hundreds of powerful images painted in earthen pigments on the smooth limestone walls: gazelles, woolly rhinos, bears and mammoths. The discovery turned out to be the work of Palaeolithic hunters who lived more than 20,000 years ago. Mounted on a shelf of rock close to the paintings was a bear's skull – a glimpse across the centuries of the deep spiritual meaning of animals in the lives of our ancestors.

For nomadic hunters then, as now, animals were symbols – ports of entry into deeper dimensions of reality. Today, game animals are still valued as intermediaries between the human world and the divine. The Cree in northern Canada believe that if people take more game than they need or lack respect for the hunted, the tacit pact joining the animal and human communities will be broken. Geese flying overhead and ducks fluttering in marshes have a moral link to the people who hunt them. So hunters retrieve their prey not in victory but in a spirit of thanks. Far from seeing themselves in a fight for survival with creatures of the wild, they feel bonds of sympathy for the species they stalk. Northern peoples like the Inuit or Chukchee identify with the whale, polar bear and caribou. Africans like the Okiek and the San identify with the bushbuck and the giraffe. Hunters see themselves and the world around them through the eyes of the animal.

Nineteenth-century anthropologists thought that early cultures believed themselves to be descendants of animals and thus

PHOTO: JEFF SPEED

NOMADS

ANIMALS



God-given link: a pensive moment for this Somali woman as she shepherds her family's flock (left); while reindeer herder in northern Russia bundles up against the cold (above).

to be bears, otters or eagles. A 'totemic' species was worshipped as a god, revered as an ancestor and classified as kin. Those who shared a totem were considered bound by blood to defend and avenge each another, to avoid intermarriage and to mutually 'respect' the species by refraining from harming or eating totemic animals as well as protecting them.

Today, most specialists share the view of noted French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. He suggests that we should see totemic systems not as a primitive stage of religion, but as a common tendency of all human beings to classify the social world in natural terms. Among the Iroquois in North America there are Bear, Eagle and Turtle Clans. The Maasai in East Africa have red, white, blue and striped 'cattle clans'. But are these practices any more exotic than fans cheering their favourite sports teams: the Chicago Bulls, the Detroit Tigers or the Toronto Raptors? And what about those of us who share a longing to drive a Mustang, Cougar or Jaguar?

Lichen under snow

In a modern world plagued by environmental destruction and loss of biodiversity we are rediscovering knowledge held by indigenous peoples regarding the natural world. Nomadic hunters have to be behavioural ecologists, and herders must know animal science and range ecology. Lapps, for example, know when and where reindeer will seek lichen under winter snow; Inuit know where seals lie, how long they stay under water and which ripples betray their presence. The Turkana in northern Kenya bring their camels, cattle, goats and sheep to the Rift Valley Floor during the wet season. Then in the dry season the cattle and sheep are moved to the cooler mountains while camels and goats browse the remaining lowland shrubs.

No-one knows why people undertook to domesticate grazing animals 10,000 years ago. Killing some animals for meat would have done little to advance the domestication of other live animals and milking was adopted long after more docile domestic animals had appeared. So why were animals domesticated if it meant lots of hard work without any immediate benefits? It may well be that the answers lie in a perceived affinity with animals, along with a 'passion' to embrace and control them.

Pastoral people in particular have an intense interest in domestic livestock. Usually one animal is culturally dominant – it is crucial for subsistence and also used as a yardstick for measuring wealth. Whether yak, llama or cow, the dominant animal is both a medium of exchange and an object of emotional interest and symbolic elaboration. Moreover, pastoralists internalize the image of their dominant animal.

The animal becomes part of a herder's inner sense of self and a lens through which the world is perceived and understood. Pastoral communities everywhere make their ultimate gift to god by sacrificing their most prized animal.

The Nuer of the Sudan take their names from their favourite oxen and cows and draw parallels from their herds to define their own social relations and talk about community life. The gift of cattle from the groom to a wife's family, usually called 'bridewealth', establishes links between the two families that expand over time as the cattle reproduce and are in turn given to others. Today, with the coming of a market economy, Nuer separate their herd into 'cattle of women' and 'cattle of money', since it would be 'polluting' were the former sold or the latter given for marriage.

Maasai sometimes use special names with partners, calling one another 'my bull' or 'my heifer' or 'my cow'. For the Maasai, too, the words for colours, patterns and shapes come from their herds. It is not that terms to describe animals are then used to label colours and patterns, but rather that the system of colours and patterns and shapes are drawn from livestock. There is no 'red' per se, only the redness of a particular type of cow, no 'striped' per se, only a streaked pattern found on particular animals. Thus the world of nature – the patterns of clouds in the sky, the form of rocks, the texture of landscape, the shape of human limbs – are all expressed in the idiom of the animal.

State of grace

Many pastoralists consider their link with domestic animals to be God-given. They emphasize their reliance on herd animals by prohibiting the hunting or eating of wild animals. Most herders usually consume milk products as staple foods but any wanton eating of meat is prohibited. Milk can be eaten fresh or sour or as butter. Meat is usually only sacrificed in special rituals and blessings – holiest when roasted or

used in the distilled form of fat. Only on special Islamic feasts are camels sacrificed by Bedouin, Tuareg or Somali nomads. There is no cruelty, but rather an attitude towards the victim akin to gratitude. The sacrificial animal should be holy, a perfect specimen – a strong, patient castrate rather than an irascible bull. At its death, its spirit establishes a link between a community and divinity, a state of grace. Whoever eats the flesh becomes one with the group, assuming its obligations and prerogatives. The animal serves to unify the group, joining it to God and advancing its members to another stage of life.

It is sometimes claimed that the pastoralists' attitude to their livestock is religious rather than economic, since they prefer to accumulate animals rather than sell or slaughter them. In fact it is more complex than that – economic logic is coupled with a strong cultural bond. We now realize that there is a good reason to build up herd numbers as a hedge against drought and as a store of 'capital'. Anyone who draws on 'capital' by routinely slaughtering animals and eating meat rather than relying on 'interest' by drinking milk is seen as a wastrel and a fool.

Nomads treasure few possessions. But they deeply value kin and livestock. Periodically moving house and home, they rely most directly for their survival and well-being on one another and on their domestic animals. Pastoralism demands intimate knowledge of animals, but it also demands dedicated effort and continuous labour. Like most occupations, it is best performed as an avocation, a love which is continuously rewarding rather than occasionally profitable. When herders praise cattle in song, or dream of camels, this enhances the necessary but mundane functions of husbandry. But more than that – it's a clear example of the symbolic importance of animals to their lives. ■

John Galaty teaches at McGill University in Montreal, Canada and has written extensively on pastoralism in East Africa.

PHOTO: WARFORD / ENVIRONMENTAL PICTURE LIBRARY

Tents in the city



NOMADS
CULTURE

Ger-r-r-eat! A Mongol family relaxes inside their ger on the outskirts of Ulaan Baatar.

Terence Hay-Eadie tests the strength of nomadic tradition in Mongolia against the steam-roller of modern culture.

THERE IS A strong smell of boiled mutton in the air as we step into the circular room, taking care not to tread on the threshold. A wizened old Mongol woman wrapped in bright turquoise gets up smartly to greet us. She touches her elbow in the traditional fashion as she extends her arm to offer us a bowl of *airag*, fermented mare's milk. I smile fully and gingerly sip the liquid, trying to avoid the lumps floating on the surface. She beams at me and briskly nods her head for me to drink up, indicating that there's lots more. *Airag* is considered a delicacy by Mongol nomads who drink up to 10 litres of the stuff a day.

We are seated inside a Mongol yurt or *ger* whose shape closely resembles a dome.

Inside the vaulted roof of the tent a group of Mongol children sit transfixed before a Nintendo machine.

Although the ger is as portable as a tent, it is like a house in that it has a wooden door-frame and a panelled door. Inside, the walls are wooden latticework with sloping slats running up towards a single circular opening in the roof.

The inside space of a ger, about five metres in diameter, accommodates every aspect of a nomadic family's life. All persons and objects have their appropriate position: women to the right of the door, men to the left.

Guests are always seated in the traditional place towards the rear on one side, while the space near the door is primarily for everyday objects used in cooking or washing. Beside the entrance a stuffed

hedgehog hangs warding off evil with its spikes.

On the vast grasslands of the steppe, groups of gers resemble small clusters of aspirins on an enormous snooker table. But this ger is different. Gazing out of the entrance I can see a parked car, a vegetable garden and behind that a tall apartment building looming up. Inside, a neon light stretches across the vaulted roof of the tent, while a group of Mongol children sits transfixed before the flickering images of a Nintendo machine. There is also a fridge in the women's quarter by the door and a cassette recorder on the men's side.

Welcome to Ulaan Baatar, the capital of Mongolia, where grim apartments built during the communist era stand incongruously against a background of rolling grassland and the surrounding suburbs composed mostly of gers. One gets the feeling that if the will to move on gripped the city, it could quite easily pack up and go. However,

the inhabitants of these ger districts are not nomads in the conventional sense. During my visit there in the summer of 1993 I met accountants, doctors and engineers living in the ger suburbs.

Everyone is linked with nomadism somehow, if only because ger and apartment dwellers alike have at least some relatives out in the steppe whom they visit regularly. For Mongols, the very core of their national identity is intricately intertwined, indeed inseparable, from that of nomadism. In my time there I found that even Mongols living in apartments spoke nostalgically of retiring to a ger in the steppe.

In the suburbs around Ulaan Baatar, families own a small number of animals,

relying on their relatives in the steppe for most of their food. Although some of them work in town they still consider their life closely akin to the 'pure' steppe livelihood. They live in gers as their forbears have always done and there is, above all, 'open air' all around.

Ulaan Baatar shows links to the pastoralist lifestyle everywhere. Herders often ride through the central square on horseback in front of the imposing cement buildings of the former communist Government. In the street below my host's flat, cows would sometimes appear and try to enter the building, while sheep and goats kept the grass verges around town as short as any electric lawnmower.

The inhabitants of Ulaan Baatar's ger districts display a remarkable ingenuity in adapting their lifestyle to the city. Unable to afford to buy or to make the traditional felt roof, many families have erected a second roof over their gers to protect the valuable felt from rain. Some have gone as far as building cement gers, while others actually spend half the year in the steppe and half living outside Ulaan Baatar.

The urban ger is a tangible cultural symbol which helps to maintain the resilience of the Mongol identity. In the tent cities, people have managed to integrate TVs, fridges, and in some cases computer terminals, into the symbolic space inside their gers – and hence into their way of life. Nomadism is often said to be at odds with modernity, yet the dynamic pragmatism of nomads in Ulaan Baatar shows that traditional lifestyles are not completely incompatible with the pluralistic vision of sustainable cities.

When I said goodbye to the old woman at the end of our meeting, she grinned and added wisely: 'A ger would be a good place to live anywhere, even in England.' ■

Terence Hay-Eadie is a postgraduate in environmental studies at Oxford University, England.

PHOTO: TERENCE HAY-EADIE

The NI Interview

Mohammed Wardi

Brian Scudder talks to Mohammed Wardi, one of Sudan's leading musicians, about the fundamentalist assault on music and musicians in his country.

KHOJALI OSMAN died in the back of a Sudanese ambulance. The frenzied knife attack that slashed his chest and ruptured his stomach was the work of an Islamic militant. And Khojali's crime? Simply to have been a musician.

Khojali's death rocked Sudan. For he is the first artist to have been killed in a politically-motivated attack in the country's history. His death also symbolizes the final collapse of tolerance in a country once renowned for it. While the military-Islamacist government of Lieutenant-General Al-Bashir denies any knowledge of the murderer, many Sudanese believe it was the climate of perpetual hysteria fostered by the Government to keep itself in power that prompted the killing. This is certainly what Mohammed Wardi thinks. The last freely-elected head of the Sudanese Musicians' Union and a close friend of Khojali, Wardi has watched the slow painful closing-down of Sudanese music culture from his enforced exile in Cairo. For him the attack on Khojali is an attack on all Sudanese musicians and a direct result of Government policy.

'The Imam's main sermon from the Friday prayers at the Central Mosque is televised throughout Sudan,' Wardi points out. 'A week before the attack this sermon condemned music and musicians as *haram* [forbidden under the realm's version of Islamic Law]. It is the Government that directly controls the contents of the sermon through the recently-created Ministry of Social Planning. We know that there had already been a great deal of debate in Government circles about music and Islam. A ban on men and women dancing together was already in place. The ground was well prepared for such an attack.'

Wardi points out that the attack was not an isolated incident. The way the Government has played on the feelings of the profoundly religious in Sudan has created an anti-music climate and resulted in verbal assaults on Sudanese musicians (particularly women). 'The Government has backed this up with a Public Order Act that empowers the security police to break up concerts and wedding ceremonies that infringe its interpretation of Shari'a law,' says Wardi. 'You do not know whether you will return from giving a concert or not. They fear the power of musicians over the hearts and minds of the people and are try-

ing to stop them playing or being broadcast. They are trying to replace them with new musicians of no talent whose sole purpose is to promote their ideology by singing pro-Government songs about *Jihad* [Islamic struggle].'

Khojali Osman and Mohammed Wardi are representative of a different kind of Islam, a tolerant Islam with capacity not just to co-exist with other religions and cultures, but to embrace them as its own. Sudan's diverse musical heritage is an expression of this mutual respect and cohesion. It is for this reason the Government finds it dangerous.

'They could have no reason to kill Khojali as an individual,' says Wardi, 'Unlike some of his colleagues he was not political. Over the past 25 years he composed neither for governments or political parties.'

Khojali's murderer, Suleiman Adam Musa, however, appears a typical activist of militant Islam. He is a member of a militant group in the impoverished area of Omdurman, where the attack took place. Musa cried *Allah-u-akbar* (God is great!), and declared himself a *mujadi* or Islamic fighter as he stabbed. He had gone pretending to have letters for two other famous Sudanese singers at the Musicians' Union Building, but finding neither present had lashed out at the closest to hand.

Although Musa's group have no reported links to the Government, it is part of a network of Islamic groups under the umbrella of the Islamic Brotherhood. The Government relies on these for support and to help with the indoctrination of the Sudanese people. Musa has now become a pawn in a government damage-limitation exercise aimed at absolving it of any responsibility for Khojali's death.

'A press release was issued on behalf of the Musicians' Union following the murder. This proved to have come directly from the Minister of Information. Most Union members didn't even see it. No post-mortem was carried out on Khojali's body and the Minister of the Interior ordered the body to be buried at night – to avoid the burial becoming a focus for anti-Government feeling.' Wardi is disdainful of the cover-up: 'A delirious Musa was put on television to prove he was mentally unstable. Yet Abdul Gadar Salim, another musician wounded in the attack, confirms that he had an entirely lucid 10-minute conversation with Musa before he pulled the knife. Musa was politically motivated and not mad.'

This was not the end of the matter for Wardi. He was in London promoting his latest release when Khojali was stabbed back in Khartoum. He attended a demonstration outside the Sudanese embassy and sang a song about his friend's murder. When he got back to his apartment, Wardi found a letter slipped under the door. The author of the letter had taken verses from the Koran and used them to threaten Wardi over his support for Sudanese music. The letter was signed 'Your Brother In Islam', the signature of the Islamic Brotherhood. ■

Brian Scudder is a freelance journalist working in London, England.



ILLUSTRATION: ALAN HUGHES

Reviews



film

Once Were Warriors

directed by Lee Tamahori

ADAPTED FROM ALAN DUFF'S controversial novel by playwright Riwi Brown, **Once Were Warriors** is a raw and bold tale of family life in contemporary urban Aotearoa/New

A strong performance by Nena Owen (right) as Beth, fighting for her Maori future as husband Jake resorts to drink and fists.

Zealand. This is not the green forests of God's own country, but a nicotine-yellow concrete wasteland of shanty-style houses. It is also very much a woman's story, told mostly from the point of view of Beth Heke, a proud woman who left her Maori homelands to marry her husband Jake.

But eighteen years and five children later, the marriage is held together by some

strange kind of love as Beth is subjected to Jake's shockingly abusive behaviour. Unemployed, he drinks and gambles away the housekeeping money with his mates at the local roadhouse and turns upon Beth when she complains. As a result Beth invests all the more in her children and their future.

Duff's novel received some criticism for its depiction of Maori men as lazy, drunken brutes. But this film comes up with no such simplistic pronouncements. Jake's conduct towards Beth is connected to his own sense of desolation as the working-class Maori is seen to be well and truly abandoned by his or her country. Contrasted with Jake are his two eldest sons, Nig and Boogie.

Estranged from his father, Nig finds a new family when he joins a local gang – an urban tribe of leather-clad and tattooed warriors. Initiation rites include a punch-up with the leader of the pack. This ritualizing of an aspect of masculinity is also evident with the younger son Boogie, who is sent away to reform school for petty theft.

There, under the tutelage of a Maori social worker, he learns about the traditions of Maori culture: 'You think that your fist is your weapon. When I finish with you, your mind will be your weapon that you carry inside you.'

Clearly, much has been sacrificed in contemporary culture and women seem to be the first to lose out. But this sense is swiftly re-addressed by Beth's own sense of her cultural past and future. In a strong performance by Rena Owen, Beth walks tall. And ultimately the film is about her rite of passage as she learns to use her own spiritual armoury.

Politics ★★★★★

Entertainment ★★★★★



music

Zig Zag

by Les Negresses Vertes

(Virgin/Delabel CDDLB12 CD only)

WHEN, IN 1989, Les Negresses Vertes were recording their first album, *Mlah*, they devised a uniquely instant form of road-testing their songs. The band, all 10 of them, would straggle to the nearest metro, set up their guitars and accordions and busk to the passers-by.

Blending flamenco guitars with ska horns, rai rhythms with vocals drawn straight from the French Cabaret tradition, there was always something about Les Negresses which was perfectly Parisian. In delivering a music that negotiated so many influences they championed not just their own visibility, but that of the Paris immigrants as well. *Mlah* is Algerian slang for 'It's okay' and the area in which Les Negresses lived seethed with the conflicting cries of North African traders and the supporters of Le Pen's ultra-rightists.

Zig Zag is the band's third album and it appears after a tragic event. Lead singer Noel 'Helno' Rota died from an overdose in 1993 just as the second album, *Famille Nombreuse*, was released. Les Negresses have now regrouped themselves. Slimmed down to five members, vocals are shared by accordionist Mathieu Canavese, guitarist Stefane Mellino and bassist Paulo.

They may lack the darker nuances of Helno's Pogue-ish delivery, but there is a more mature spirit in **Zig Zag**. And the overall sound remains big. Iza Mellino claps, shrieks and stamps her heels like a flamenco diva. And Mich Ochowiak's ska-trombone lends a gloriously ramshackle feel to proceedings.

The band have always used their nominal blackness – and greenness and femaleness, for that matter – to signify their outsider status. Their politics on issues of race and nationality are expressed through a vivaciously

woven musical tapestry. There are French-language songs on existential matters of the 'drink, live, for tomorrow we die' variety interspersed with sexy dance numbers filled with wild gypsy yells and jaunty accordion accompaniment.

Listening to **Zig Zag** is rather like wandering into a bazaar and experiencing a musical Babel of swerving rhythms and textures. More pertinently, it's a vigorous and exhilarating celebration of multicultural life.

Politics ★★★★★

Entertainment ★★★★★





Return to Paradise

by Breyten Breytenbach

(faber and faber ISBN 0 571 171796)

IN 1975 Breyten Breytenbach was sentenced to seven years in solitary confinement by the South African Government for his activities on behalf of the African National Congress (ANC). Following his imprisonment Breytenbach lived in Paris as an exiled poet and painter.

In *Return to Paradise*, the journal of his homecoming, Breytenbach contemplates the changing political backdrop from a voyeur's perspective. 'I used to be part of the South African people,' he says, but no longer even though 'I still know them from within'.

In recalling numerous episodes of the grisly past, Breytenbach reveals his scepticism towards the tendency that 'everybody who wants to be somebody in the country now lays claim to having been in the resistance movement'. He insists that 'there are perceptions which we refuse to face'. Namely: What do whites really think of blacks? And blacks of whites? For him 'reconciliation' can only take place once we're ready to lay these suppressed hind-thoughts on the table.

Even though Breytenbach's view is submerged by the anguish of his personal experience, he still manages to unleash countless poetic images of Africa's exquisite landscape. It is in 'its bareness, its horizons burned clean of history and time', that we sense Breytenbach rediscovering the essence of his country. As a cynical yet moving account, *Return to Paradise* reveals an impressionistic portrait of South Africa from someone who has suffered, seen and still feels.

Politics ★★☆☆

Entertainment ★★☆☆

Gödel, Escher, Bach

...being the book that thinks about thinking about thinking about thinking.

IT WAS A CURIOUS TOME I became acquainted with long before I read it. The title alone – *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid. A Metaphorical Fugue on Minds and Machines in the Spirit of Lewis Carroll* – ignited sensations of incongruity, juxtaposing two names I knew alongside two I didn't. Who exactly were Gödel and Escher, and what did they have to do with Bach and Carroll?

Inside, the book was littered with mesmerizing illustrations. These depicted staircases which seemed to go both up and down and yet had inconceivable meeting points; interiors in which ceilings were floors and floors ceilings. They turned out to be the work of MC Escher, a modern Dutch artist who specialized in 'impossible' constructions. I could see their relation to Lewis Carroll in that they cause exhilarating bafflement, just as the verbal conundrums of *Alice in Wonderland* do. One of the things Hofstadter's book seemed to offer was what any viewer of Escher or reader of Carroll has felt the need of: an investigation into the contradictions we experience between our thoughts and our perceptions. Our minds say Escher's *Möbius Strips* are impossible; our eyes say: 'But there they are!' How are these simultaneous reactions possible?

For a long time I didn't try to find out. I regularly picked up Hofstadter's book in bookshops, leafed through it in perplexity and admiration, and left without it, usually unnerved by the impression it had given of a mind much more adventurous and multi-dimensional than mine. The fact that it was 800 pages long increased my fear that the book was a labyrinth I would simply get lost in. But I had browsed enough to understand the title. Both a 'braid' and a 'fugue' are formed by weaving separate strands together into one, and what Hofstadter weaves together are the mental operations required to make sense of mathematics (Gödel), visual art (Escher), music (Bach), and literature (Carroll). The result is a 'metaphorical fugue'. Furthermore, a 'fugue' in psychiatry designates an altered state of consciousness, often involving memory loss and wandering away from home. Hofstadter compels his readers to 'lose their memory' – in the sense of abandoning cherished common-sense thought processes – and 'wander away from home'. That is, to explore unfamiliar mental regions.

And he succeeds. Ten minutes with *Gödel, Escher, Bach* is enough to induce a mild fugue in anybody. This has as much to do with its form as its content. Each of his 20 chapters is preceded by a philosophical dialogue between Achilles and the Tortoise, and each is 'patterned' on a different Bach composition. Hofstadter calls this alternation between chapters and dialogues 'counterpoint': 'Almost every new concept is first presented metaphorically in a Dialogue, yielding a set of concrete, visual images; then these serve, during the reading of the following

Chapter, as an intuitive background for a more serious and abstract presentation of the same concept.' Hofstadter is sensitive to the need to 'weave together' the differing mental predispositions of his readers. He consequently produces a formidable genre-buster which renounces the temptation to deal exclusively in either the 'metaphorical' language of art or the 'abstract' language of science. It is part of Hofstadter's



DRAWING BY M C ESCHER

project to demonstrate the indissolubility of both kinds of thinking in the human mind.

I never bought *Gödel, Escher, Bach*. A friend eventually forced it upon me as a birthday gift. It sat on my small Vesuvius of books-to-read until about two years ago when I undertook to wrestle with it. I lost. I got as far as page 370, on which Hofstadter presents us with a drawing which he calls 'a tiny portion of the author's "semantic network"' for the construction of the book. This looked like so much spaghetti that – my sense of information overload already acute – I allowed my endurance to collapse entirely. I began to suspect that Hofstadter had designed *Gödel, Escher, Bach* as a perverse experiential lesson to his readers about the limitations of their minds.

I'm proud to say that I've since had another tilt at it, jumping straight in at page 371 and trusting my memory to reconstruct enough of the book's first half for me to cope with the second. The second half is a series of eloquent meditations on brain functioning and the possibility of 'artificial intelligence'. The 16 years that have passed since this book's first publication have seen a computer revolution which makes this debate hotter than ever. Its contribution to this dialogue is its attempt to understand what 'real' human intelligence is in the first place, and its concern with seeing the mind as a complicated whole.

Sometime in 1995 I am going to do my best to re-read *Gödel, Escher, Bach* as a whole rather than two halves, and thus pay back its compliment to my mind.

Macdonald Daly

Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid by Douglas R Hofstadter is published by Penguin and Basic Books, 1979.

Curiosities



QUESTIONS THAT HAVE ALWAYS INTRIGUED YOU ABOUT THE WORLD WILL APPEAR IN THIS, YOUR SECTION, AND BE

ANSWERED BY OTHER READERS. PLEASE ADDRESS YOUR ANSWERS AND QUESTIONS TO 'CURIOSITIES'.

What is the origin of the expression 'a different kettle of fish'?

● Contrary to the answer given in NI 264 I thought the expression was 'a different quintal (kwin'tel) of fish'. In Newfoundland a quintal was 112 pounds of



In quest of a quintal? Fishing in the Central African Republic.

fish. The expression was used to refer to something that was completely different or something that wasn't really as it first appeared.

Jim Leonard
Placentia, Canada

How come gases which are normally considered heavier than air are reaching the upper layers of our atmosphere?

● In addition to the answers given in NI 265, the thing to remember is that gases –

unlike liquids or solids – have no natural boundary. When a new gas is put in a container the individual molecules continue to move around at an average speed depending on the amount of energy in the gas (the hotter the gas, the greater the energy).

The molecules move in random directions, colliding frequently with one another. This process of collisions equalizes the energies – and the heat. The gases thus diffuse into each other. Any individual molecule of a heavier gas needs a greater energy to rise to a given height than a molecule of lighter gas. But the distribution of energy in a gas follows a statistical spread (the Maxwell-Boltzmann distribution), so within the mixture of gases there will always be some with enough energy to reach great heights.

Tim Jones
Mostar, Bosnia

AWAITING YOUR ANSWERS

Is there any evidence that matriarchal cultures were (or are, where they exist) more egalitarian than patriarchal ones?

Martin Ferreira
Montreal, Canada

Whatever happened to Wangari Maathai, reported in the April 1992 issue of NI as having been clubbed unconscious? Did she recover and where is she now?

Anon
Australia

Last Spring Kenya's ruler, Daniel arap Moi, commented that he intended to channel aid towards people who supported him and away from those who

did not. In light of this, have any of the organizations that provide aid for Kenya changed their policies or taken steps to ensure that their aid really does go to those in need?

Michael Lumber
Granada, Spain

How did human beings learn to take hard, inedible seeds, grind them up, mix them with water and cook them to get something they could eat?

Susan Atherton
Telford, England

Which Third World countries have democratic governments, free and non-fraudulent elections, and good human-rights records?

Jennie Gamlin,
Preston, England

What are revolutionaries such as Leila Khaled, Daniel Cohn Bendit, Bernadette Devlin, No Nguyen Giap, Bobby Seale, Abu Nidal and Wadi Haddad doing now?

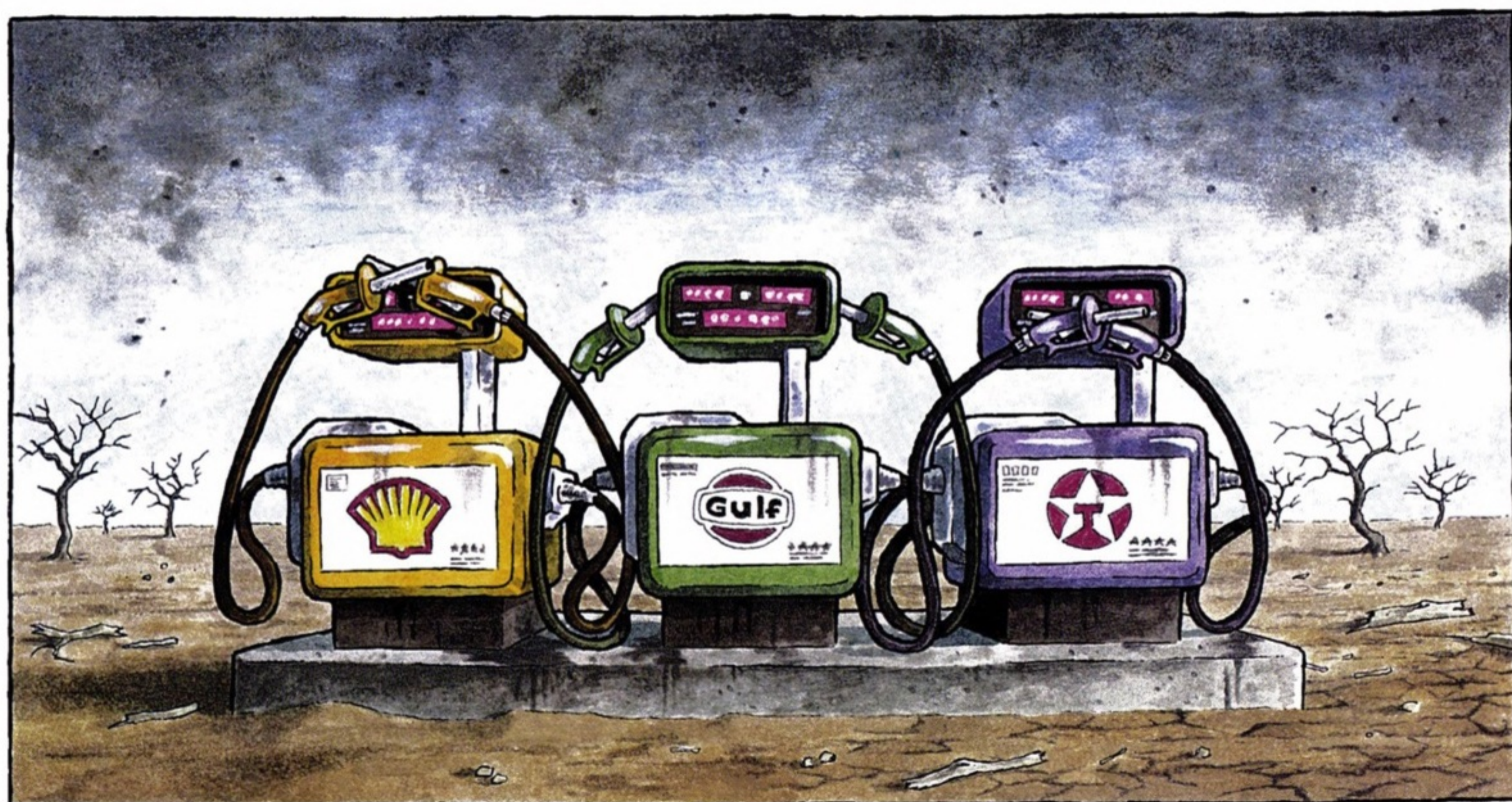
J Cotton
Loughton, England.

Has anyone calculated the extent to which Britain's former colonies helped make Britain a 'developed' nation? What has been their economic impact over the centuries?

David Salter
Cardiff, Wales

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR ANSWERS PLEASE SEND THEM TO **CURIOSITIES, NEW INTERNATIONALIST, 55 RECTORY ROAD, OXFORD OX4 1BW, UK, OR TO YOUR LOCAL NI OFFICE (SEE INSIDE FRONT COVER FOR ADDRESSES).**

POLYP
big bad world



A splendid torch

Peter Adamson pays tribute to the inspirational life of Jim Grant, the former Executive Director of UNICEF.

WHEN JIM GRANT died of cancer in January of this year, his small room in a suburban hospital near New York was crowded with messages of goodwill from all over the world. Among them were many from Presidents and Prime Ministers, including a note at his bedside from Bill Clinton thanking him 'from the bottom of my heart for your service to America, to UNICEF, and most of all to the children of the world'.

A few days later, the Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine (which New Yorkers like to claim is the largest cathedral in the world on the technicality that St Peter's is a Basilica) was packed to its 3,000-seat capacity by those who had come to pay tribute to a man whom speaker after speaker described as 'one of the true heroes of the twentieth century'.

It was an extraordinary event. Almost every country and culture was represented – in a Christian church with a Muslim prayer mat before an altar flanked by Buddhist emblems. And not even the intimidatingly religious atmosphere of the vast Gothic nave could prevent the applause that broke out when Hillary Clinton announced from the pulpit that, as a tribute to Jim Grant, the United States would at last sign the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It was an emotional moment. For almost everyone present knew that it had been one of Jim Grant's greatest frustrations that his own Government was one of the very few which had refused to sign the Convention.

Since leaving the *New Internationalist* 15 years ago, I have had the privilege of working closely with Jim Grant. Over those years, there have been times when I thought he was quite wrong, and times when I thought he was quite mad. But always the man's sheer courage, belief in what he was doing, and total lack of concern for himself, won me and many others to his side.

The measurable achievements have been documented in the many hundreds of obituaries over recent weeks. Increasing immunization from 20 per cent to 80 per cent of the developing world's children was a fight that he led from the front. Measles deaths have fallen from three million to one million a year, polio cases from 500,000 to 100,000. And it was he who took up the cause of oral rehydration therapy when it was scarcely known outside the laboratory (it is now being used by about a third of the developing world's families and saving an estimated one million lives a year). It is largely thanks to his leadership, also, that the world is on the brink of eliminating vitamin A deficiency and the iodine-deficiency disorders which have long been a major cause of preventable mental retardation (26 million people are severely brain damaged in the world today).

In pursuit of such outrageously ambitious goals, Jim Grant met

with almost every President and Prime Minister in the developing world – never without the sachet of oral rehydration salts in his pocket, or a dropper to test whether the salt at the state dinner was iodized, or the latest figure for the number of children being killed and malnourished by vaccine-preventable disease in whatever nation he happened to be visiting.

But as the tributes poured in during January and February, I could not help remembering those times in the early and mid-1980s when Jim Grant seemed to be surrounded by nothing but criticism and hostility: his goals were not achievable; they were too 'top down'; he was 'tunnel visioned'; he was 'dealing only with symptoms'. The development establishment, in particular, scorned the simple solutions he espoused.

As all who worked with him knew, Jim Grant had a detailed grasp of development issues, from economics to demography. But he put all of his knowledge and experience at the service of simplicity. And he did so because he was interested not in impressing his intellectual equals but in getting things done. And he knew that this meant reaching out with powerful, simple, repeated messages to politicians, press and public.

His courage, determination, and self-belief during those early years carried many doubters like me. The more the experts told him that it was impossible to raise immunization levels to 80 per cent by 1990, or to reach the vast majority of the world's families with other low-cost methods of health protection, the more physi-

cal and mental energy he would throw at the task, the more he would search for ways to 'end-run' the problems, and the more he would demand of his shell-shocked troops.

For the last two years he travelled the world and worked his 18-hour days visiting over 40 heads of state knowing that he was dying. Over that whole time I never heard him complain or even refer to his illness except for practical purposes. The nearest he came was the special gleam in his eye when he used what became one of his favourite quotations:

'This is the true joy in life, being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one. I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community, and, as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no brief candle to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.'

Peter Adamson co-founded *New Internationalist* and has worked for many years on UNICEF's *The State of the World's Children*.



Jim Grant: 'I rejoice in life for its own sake.'

RUBINTO / UNICEF

Country profile

Solomon Islands

THE Solomon Islands and its largest island, Guadalcanal, may be known to fans of Hollywood movies as the site of one of the key battles in the Pacific during World War Two. A British colony between the two world wars, the Solomons were invaded by the Japanese in 1942. Recaptured by the Americans after a six-month battle, the islands were finally granted independence in July 1978. The US provided much initial aid to the Solomons, but now Japan has a much greater influence, providing 40 per cent of the country's aid.

There are six main islands, each containing a large number of small villages – over half the population live in communities of fewer than 200 people, and most of these still practise subsistence farming. The isolation of the villages has fostered the development of over 80 distinct languages. The extended family system is strongly adhered to in a society as yet untouched by broadcast television – though video cinema is popular in towns.

Solomon Island politics are characterized by personalities rather than political parties. In October 1994, after just 16



months as Prime Minister, Francis Billy Hilary resigned amid a political crisis. Early in November Solomon Mamaloni, twice in power in the 1980s, was once again elected Prime Minister.

Mamaloni has an economic and environmental crisis on his hands. In recent years the largest export earner has been timber supplied mainly to Japan. But since 1992 logging

rates have doubled to four times the sustainable level – environmentalists have calculated that, if current logging rates continue, the forest will be totally wiped out by the end of the decade. When several aid donors threatened to withdraw support, Hilary's Government placed limits on the generous logging quotas.

Hilary's anti-logging stance may have helped bring him down

– loss of income from the logging industry will have dramatic effects on the economy and involve substantial job losses. It remains to be seen whether Mamaloni will continue the new limits on logging. He has something of an environmental track record, having rejected proposals by Western companies to dump industrial waste on the islands.

Since the beginning of the 1990s Government expenditure has doubled and foreign debt has steadily increased. But there is a renewed attempt to build a self-reliant economy and reduce dependence on external aid. Employers who hire overseas workers are obliged to train local counterparts and land can be wholly owned only by indigenous people.

In recent years violence from the island of Bougainville, which is governed by neighbouring Papua New Guinea, has overflowed into Solomon territory. Peaceful negotiations have so far been unsuccessful, but the Islands would be hard put to hold their own in a confrontation with their much bigger neighbour. Economic problems would be greatly eased if precious cash were not spent guarding the border.

Orly Jacobson

AT A GLANCE



Leader Prime Minister Solomon Mamaloni – but the titular head of state is still the British Queen, represented by a Governor-General.
Economy GNP per capita \$580 (US \$22,240)

Monetary unit: Solomon Island Dollar

Main exports: Fish, timber, copra, palm oil

Main imports: Machinery, transport equipment, mineral fuels

External debt: \$130.3 million (1991)

The economy is agriculturally dominated and the subsistence economy contributes 38% of GDP. The main drain on the economy is the high cost of importing fuel. There are high hopes for tourism, which is low at the moment but should increase as more cruise ships include the islands on their route.

People 342,000. Population growth rate 3.5% per annum.

Health Infant mortality 27 per 1,000 live births (US 9 per 1,000)

Culture Melanesian 95%. The rest are a mixture of Polynesians, Micronesians (from Kiribati), Chinese and European.

Religion: Mainly Christian.

Languages: Over 80 languages. Pidgin is widely spoken and English is spoken in towns.

Sources: State of the World's Children 1994; Asia & Pacific Review 1993/94; Third World Guide 93/94; and information supplied by the author.

Never previously profiled

NI star rating

EXCELLENT	★★★★★
GOOD	★★★★
FAIR	★★★
POOR	★★
APPALLING	★

STAR RATINGS



INCOME DISTRIBUTION

★★★
A small cash economy.



SELF-RELIANCE

★★
Increasing dependence on Japanese aid and on fuel imports.



POSITION OF WOMEN

★★★
Only 18.5% of the workforce is female but the first woman Cabinet Minister was appointed in 1994.



LITERACY

★★★
62% (1985-90). Education is not compulsory and only 60% of children attend primary school.



FREEDOM

★★★★★
Democratic elections are peaceably contested and the press is uncensored.



LIFE EXPECTANCY

★★★★
70 years. This compares with the 77 years in the regional superpower, Australia.

POLITICS



NI ASSESSMENT ★★★

The Solomon Islands have not developed political parties in the Western democratic tradition – alliances ebb and flow around individuals. This may be no bad thing: the strong emphasis on indigenous traditions and subsistence agriculture is healthy. But politicians all too often seek the quick fix.

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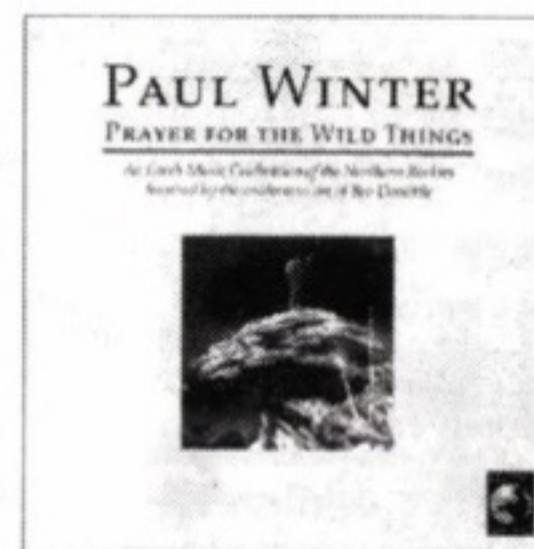
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